DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 319 439	JC 900 288

AUTHOR	Cornell, L.; And Others
TITLE	Easing the Transition from Secondary School to College.
INSTITUTION	John Abbott Coll., Sainte Anne de Bellevue (Quebec).
PUB DATE	Jan 90
NOTE	141p.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC06 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Academic Achievement; *College Bound Students; *College Environment; College Freshmen; *College Preparation; Community Colleges; Educational Counseling; High Schools; High School Seniors; Socialization; *Student Adjustment; *Student Attitudes; Student College Relationship; Two Year Colleges; Two Year College Students
IDENTIFIERS	*Canada

ABSTRACT

In an inter-institutional action research project, seven teachers from three high schools and two colleges in Canada interviewed 88 students as they looked forward to college, experienced the first semester, and looked back after the second semester. The purpose was to discover what student perceptions and what institutional policies and practices function as obstacles to student success in the first year of college. The first step of the study was to determine when the transition began by examining institutional characteristics of high schools and how high schools prepare students for college. Student responses in this area indicated that students perceive college as a difficult place where they won't be looked after and where they will have to do their work on their own. The second part of the study examined what life at college was like, in terms of students' impressions of the institutional characteristics of John Abbott College (JAC), the social aspects of the college, and the first weeks of enrollment at JAC. The third part of the study examined the responses of veteran students, who more clearly defined the transition from high school to college and first-semester experiences. The student responses emphasized the challenge of surviving the freedom from constraints long enough to mature into the freedom to choose responsibility. The final component of the study examined how each member of the research team experienced change during the study. Recommendations of the research team emphasized listening to students more, assuming teachers know less, and focusing on the process of learning. Attached appendixes include monthly research reports, a listing of research methods, summary reports from first and second data analysis workshops, and a sample interview with a second semester student. (JMC)

ED319439

Easing the Transition

From Secondary School To College

The P³ (Perception, Policy & Practice) Committee

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L. Dickie, John Abbott College
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ISBN 0-921017-10-8

EASING THE TRANSITION

FROM SECONDARY SCHOOL TO COLLEGE

The P^3 (Perception, Policy, and Practice) Committee:

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Ste-Anne de Bellevue, Québec

January 1990

This research was funded by *Direction générale de l'enseignement collégial, Programme d'aide à la recherche sur l'enseignement et l'apprentissage*, the Lakeshore School Board, the Baldwin-Cartier School Commission, and John Abbott College Research and Development.

Additional copies of this report may be obtained from John Abbott College, Research and Development, P.O. Box 2000, Ste-Anne de Bellevue, Québec, H9X 3L9, Tel: (514) 457-6610, for a fee of $5.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Funding for this research was contributed by the Programme d'aide à la recherche sur l'enseignement et l'apprentissage, the Direction générale de l'enseignement collégial, the Lakeshore School Board, the Baldwin-Cartier School Commission and John Abbott College Research and Development.

Denise Bourgeois, Coordinator of John Abbott College Faculty Professional Development Services, provided inspiration, encouragement, and practical assistance of every imaginable kind. Denise's vision of research as a tool for institutional improvement and individual professional development led to the creation of the Research Training Institute (RTI), which since 1985, has provided training and a resource network for college researchers. Members of the RTI Inter-Institutional Committee critiqued early drafts of the *Easing The Transition* research proposal.

We particularly valued the support of John C. Jared, Director of Secondary Education, and Martin P. Murphy, Director of Curriculum Services, who believed in the project strongly enough to persuade their respective Executive Committees to contribute funding at a time when their budgets were severely strained. Patrick Baker of the Lakeshore School Board facilitated our communications with teachers of that Board.

At John Abbott College, Gerald Brown, Director General, and Bill Surkis, Academic Dean, smoothed our progress and encouraged us by expressing confidence in the value of our work. Peter Danson and Margaret Waller proposed the idea of a joint college-high school study of student preparation for college; the Faculty Professional Development Committee initiated and sponsored the study as one of their many contributions to the quality of college education. Members of the College Readiness Committee shared the information and experience they had acquired through several years of studying the problem of student attrition and retention. Laurie Poole and George Wall shared tapes of student interviews they had done for the Marketing Task Force. Numerous individual college teachers contributed ideas, sent us commentaries on monthly research reports, and welcomed researchers in their classes. In addition, Bill Doran, Frank Hofmann, Carol Greene, Steve Martin, Mila Peskir, Shirley Sawyer, Richard Turner, and Joe Vien made special contributions through their participation in the Research Seminar in which the pilot study for this project was carried out.

Many high school teachers, counsellors, and principals welcomed us in classrooms, bought us cafeteria lunches, and shared their ideas. John Holden, former teacher at Macdonald High School (presently teaching in Germany), and Bill MacDougall, Consultant to the Protestant School Board of Greater Montreal, volunteered as members of the P3 Committee from 1987-88. John and Bill contributed good humour and practical suggestions during the development of the research proposal.

At our final Data Analysis Workshop, Jacques Laliberté, of the Faculté d'éducation, Université de Sherbrooke, led a discussion of the implications of our research for the Québec College network. His insights made the composition of our

concluding chapter easier. Jacques, and other members of the Groupe Recherche-Action du programme C.P.E.C.- PERFORMA, also critiqued preliminary drafts of the research proposal.

Joan Patel and Anne Hess transcribed the interviews and contributed valuable commentaries from their perspective as parents of college students. Desirée Robillard, John Abbott student, professional word processor, and Wonder Woman prepared the manuscript for this report in record-breaking time. Every member of the John Abbott College Printing Department cheerfully took extraordinary measures to produce this final report, and our other publications, on time.

Last, most, and forever, we thank the students who guided us on this expedition of discovery over terrain we thought we knew.

Margaret Waller
Project Coordinator
Easing The Transition

P.S.: I take this opportunity to record my admiration of Jan Farrell, Leslie Dickie, Anne-Marie Kubanek, Louise Cornell, and Henriette Elizov who accomplished an amazing amount of work in an impossibly short time in spite of snow storms, strikes, road construction, leaking roofs and hot water tanks, and the innumerable quirks of their fellow researchers. They are caring teachers.

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ABSTRACT

In an inter-institutional action research project, teachers from three high schools and two colleges interviewed 88 students as they looked forward to college, experienced the first semester, and looked back with the wisdom of second semester veterans. These interviews with high school seniors and first-year college students constituted the principal data for a longitudinal case study based on socialization theory and ethnomethodology. The purpose was to discover what student perceptions, and what institutional policies and practices function as obstacles to student success in the first year of college. The hypotheses were:

1) There are institutional characteristics of both the high school and college that function as obstacles to students' success in college.

2) Student's descriptions of their experiences will reveal the above institutional characteristics.

3) Teachers can be agents for change in their institutions.

There have been numerous studies of the phenomenon of student adaptation to the first year of college. This study was unique in three ways: first, in its focus on obstacles and problems in the learning environments, as defined by students, rather than the problems of individual students, as defined by educators; secondly, in the ways in which the college and high schools collaborated in the study of these problems; thirdly, in including a professional development component, which enabled practising teachers to carry out the research.

The teacher-researchers used social science methods of inquiry to achieve two simultaneous goals: 1) a greater theoretical understanding of the transition process and 2) change in the transition process itself. The objectives of the project were: 1) to enable teachers to gather and analyze data that would sensitise them to students' expectations and needs; 2) to create research-based solutions to institutional obstacles to students' success in the first year; 3) to demonstrate a model for collaboration between college and high school teachers; and 4) to foster an enduring climate of inquiry and improvement in teaching and learning by providing research experience to teachers.

The action research strategy included a commitment to communicate the research findings in ways that could be useful to teachers. To this end, monthly research reports were distributed to the high schools and colleges throughout the project. Each monthly report combined a discussion of one problem, as defined by students, with action strategies proposed by the teacher-researchers.

The study revealed significant discontinuities between the institutional and pedagogical practices of high schools and colleges; provided vivid descriptions of what this discontinuity feels like to students as they experience it; and contributed to understanding of students' strategies for success (and failure) during the first semester of college.

INTRODUCTION - OVERVIEW AND RECOMMENDATIONS

OVERVIEW

We are seven teachers from three high schools and two colleges. We have listened closely to 88 students as they looked forward to college, experienced the first semester, and looked back with the wisdom of second semester veterans. Listening to students tell their stories has changed us and our understandings of the institutions in which we work. Often we have had to struggle to reconcile their views of our common territories (schools and classrooms) with our own understandings. It wasn't easy. In this report, we share some of our discoveries and struggles.

Our purpose has been to discover what student perceptions, and what institutional policies and practices function as obstacles to student success in the first year of college. These three "P" words (perceptions, policies, and practices) are the source of our original committee name: P3. There have been numerous studies of the phenomenon of student adaptation to the first year of college (see Bibliography). Ours is unique in three ways: first, in its focus on student-defined obstacles and problems in the learning environments, rather than on the problems of individual students' as defined by educators; secondly, in the ways in which the college and high schools collaborated in the study of these problems; thirdly, in combining a professional development component which enabled practising teachers to carry out the research.

We assumed that some of the obstacles and problems that students experience are caused by the poor fit or coordination between high schools and colleges. Therefore, we chose to look at the high school and college environments from a student point of view or perspective rather than looking at the problems inside student's heads, as defined by educators. We let the students be our teachers.

Because difficulties in the first year of college are a common concern at both high schools and colleges, high school and college teachers defined the research problem and carried out the research together. Funding was contributed from both sectors. College teachers observed in high schools and interviewed students as they moved from Grade Eleven through the first semester of college; a high school teacher worked one semester in the college observing college life and classes and interviewing second-semester college students about their first semester. The dynamic in the design involved high school and college teachers collaborating in the analysis and interpretation of the data:

> **The high school teachers held up for the college teachers a mirror for self-reflection; the college teachers held up a mirror for the high school teachers.**

In order to carry out this research, the participating teachers obtained research training and consultations with research professionals. Training was provided through John Abbott College's Faculty Professional Development Service. Day to day guidance was provided by the project coordinator, a sociologist and professional researcher.

Twice during the year of data collection and analysis, professional researchers consulted with the research team on the management, analysis, and interpretation of the data.

We chose an action research strategy in which we used social science methods of inquiry to achieve two simultaneous goals: (1) a greater theoretical understanding of the transition process and (2) change in the transition process itself. Our action research strategy included a commitment to communicate the research findings in ways that can be useful to teachers. To this end, we began distributing monthly research reports seven months after the project began. The monthly reports combined a discussion of one problem, as defined by students, with action strategies proposed by the teacher-researchers. These reports, which are included in Appendix A, offer a quick dip into our vast pool of data. We recommend them to those of you in a hurry.

The objectives of the project were: (1) to enable teachers to gather and analyze data that would sensitize them to students' expectations and needs; (2) to create research-based solutions to institutional obstacles to students' success in the first year; (3) to demonstrate a model for collaboration between college and secondary school teachers; and (4) to foster an enduring climate of inquiry and improvement in teaching and learning by providing research experience to teachers.

Interviews with Grade Eleven and first-year college students constituted the principal data for this longitudinal study which was based on socialization theory and ethnomethodology. Our hypotheses were:

(1) There are institutional characteristics of both the high school and college that function as obstacles to students' success in college; and,

(2) Students' descriptions of their experiences will reveal the above institutional characteristics.

(3) Teachers can be agents for change in their institutions.

Through systematic sampling, careful interviewing, and consultation with specialists in qualitative research during the analysis of the data, we have worked to assure the representativeness and validity of our presentation of this student's-eye-view of the transition from secondary school to college. Readers may find a detailed account of our research methods in Appendix B. In reporting our discoveries, however, we have chosen a less formal style than is usual in research reporting. This report also reflects our collaborative approach: it is a compilation of reports, each drafted by one of us then rewritten after discussion with the others. We have used the students' own words as much as possible - they speak more powerfully of their experiences than we could. Hence, we abandoned the official terminology "secondary school" for the colloquial "high school". In this text quotations from students are presented in ***boldface italic.*** Occasionally too the interviewers' remarks are included in the quotation, these appear in **boldface.**

I didn't know how to be there.

This simple statement of why one student dropped out of the first year of college describes the task of all new students: how to "be" or behave in a new social environment. This student possessed many predictors of college success including an adequate high school preparation. In spite of this, his academic career was interrupted because he was unable to discover how to "be" a college student.

The process of learning how to behave in a particular social context is called socialization. This process begins in high school (anticipatory socialization) when counsellors, teachers, returning graduates, and students' friends and older siblings tell them about college. It continues through the summer after high school graduation and is most intense during the first semester at college when each newcomer most actively engages in the process of discovering the rights and obligations of college students. We undertook to discover how students define this task; what resources and strategies they use; what obstacles and problems they encountered.

We used the sociological concept of perspective to do this. Perspective enables us to recognize that individuals in a social system see their own actions and the actions of others in terms of their unique positions, as through a distinctive lens. Human behaviour is rational, but only within the context of the assumptions and goals of the actor. Students, teachers, and other professionals inhabit the same working environment, but it is as though they are on parallel planes. Students' understandings of teachers, schools, and even life cannot be the same as those of teachers; they do, however, make sense of the world, from where students sit.

A teacher listening carefully to detailed descriptions of student experiences is, in effect, looking at the world through someone else's prescription glasses. For example, a teacher may think it is wrong for a student to say "thank you" for a good mark on an assignment. Yet to a student, who sees marks as things teachers bestow (sometimes arbitrarily) rather than as indicators of student accomplishment, saying "thank you" for a gift is sensible behaviour. Similarly, we've all had a student who attended class more or less regularly but didn't turn on any synapses or turn in any assignments. Crazy, one might think, unless one knows that the same behaviour got the student through school last year or that Dad has said: "If you don't go to school, you can't live here without paying rent."

When we have presented preliminary reports on this research, the first response from audiences of professionals, whether teachers, counsellors or administrators, whether in high schools or colleges, has been: "That's not true"; or, if the speaker was more polite: "That's not true in my school." However, when we have shared excerpts from the data and reports with students, the first response was, "Of course, we agree." As teacher-researchers we, too, have experienced dismay at some of the things that students have said. Only our training as research interviewers restrained our urges to "correct" a student's information; to blurt out: "Oh, that's not the way it is, let me explain it to you."

Students are not empty vessels into which we can easily pour the right information. For example, teachers of physics cannot simply replace a student's "wrong" understanding of motion, waves, or optics with "right" physics. Students retain their "wrong" understandings in the real world, where they appear to work, while reciting "right" physics understandings in the classroom, where they are rewarded. Thus, the first step in bringing student and teacher understandings closer together is to learn how students understand or make sense of the student experience.

As you read this report, you too may have occasion to remind yourself: these are students' perceptions. Instead of throwing rocks at us messengers, ask yourself this question: If this is the reality for students (a student truth), what does it mean for my work with students in high school or college?

Because we were searching for *student truths,* we did not conduct a survey. In survey research, the researchers ask the questions that make sense to them, within the context of their model of the problem or situation. Respondents to the questionnaire answer the question they think the researcher asked, or more often, give the reply they think the researcher wants to hear. In this project, we wanted to know what the transition looks and feels like to the students. What are the highs and lows of it? Where are the rough spots and problems? To discover these things, we asked open questions that invited students to respond with stories or narratives that revealed their understandings of teachers, schools, even life. Students' stories reveal assumptions and values at the same time that they describe what they are experiencing (see Appendix E for a sample interview).

Students do not all experience college in the same way. They come to college with many different goals: to have a good time, to relax until university, to achieve early acceptance to medical school, to finish in two years in order to collect a bribe offered by parents, to obey parents who say they have to go to college. These individual goals and past experiences influence how students see, feel, and act in college. In our analysis of these rich and varied stories, we have sought to identify commonalities - not the unique and individual. This report summarizes the predominant themes that emerged from student's stories: the truths shared by students.

In Chapter 1, LOOKING AHEAD, we place the transition from high school to college in the context of students' previous and subsequent transitions along the educational pipeline. The move to college continues two trends: joining larger groups and institutions, and experiencing less personal relationships with teachers. We then describe some ways in which high school personnel prepare students for college. One way involves what we call scare tactics. Teachers, counsellors, etc. present an image of tough, uncaring college teachers and use this image to motivate Grade Eleven students to work harder, and to work with less pushing by teachers. This tough talk is contradicted by the reports students hear from their peers; students say it is less effective than providing specific experiences, which are similar to college work methods, such as allowing students to take responsibility for completing and verifying homework, and seeking, rather than resisting, help from teachers. The chapter concludes with a college teacher reflecting the image of high schools that is derived from interviews and visits: a more structured environment, where teachers are both caring and controlling and where teachers, more than students, assume responsibility for getting students to do their work.

Chapter 2, BEING THERE, begins with a description of John Abbott College, as seen by a high school teacher: a relaxed, less-structured atmosphere where both students and teachers function with fewer rules. A vibrant social scene is intermingled with classes. Extrapolating expectations from high school to college leads to confusion. For example, high school teachers give students "extra help" outside the classroom on the teacher's own time (lunch period or after 2:30). At college, teachers tell students "my office hours are..." New students often take this literally: office hours are the teacher's time, rather than the time that teachers are contractually obligated to be available to students. Therefore, going to a teacher's office is an imposition on the teacher. (And college teachers wonder why students knock and enter with trepidation?) Some don't ever knock. For example, the student who went three times to a teacher's office' each time the door was closed. On the fourth visit, furious that the teacher was not there, the student kicked the door. The teacher opened it. In high school, a closed door is usually a locked door.

Students receive conflicting images of college. Their ideas come from older siblings, returning students, teachers, counsellors, college pamphlets, even television and films. High school teachers and counsellors talk about "responsibility", their peers emphasize freedom, fun, and social activities. Grade Eleven students revealed that the emphasis that students place on social life in college is a continuation of the party mode which dominated their final term of high school. The college itself presents conflicting images and opportunities: an attractive range of entertainments is offered simultaneously with classes. New students, inexperienced in making choices, find it difficult to choose three hours of Introduction to Poetry over a film, a comedian, or a rock band.

First Weeks summarizes students' experiences during their first weeks at college, when the differences between high school and college are most vividly problematic. They struggle with a loss of identity (being a nameless face in the crowd), and a change in the pace of activities (being on fast forward). Moving to college entails learning to be alone, not necessarily lonely. Previously, students have moved from year to year as a class. They now follow more individualized tracks. Except for students in career programs (e.g. Correctional Technology, Nursing, or Professional Theatre), they have no ready-made group identity. The loss of an old identity may be welcomed as an opportunity to establish a new one as a successful student. A successful student identity is dependent upon validation in the form of teacher recognition and positive evaluation of some of their work. These are often delayed and sometimes not forthcoming.

High school students' descriptions of what they think college will be like and how it might be different from high school are vague, undetailed. The clearest pictures of the first-semester student experience emerged from the reflections of second-semester students. In Chapter 3, LOOKING BACK, we summarize veteran students' perspectives on their transition, in which two words reverberate: freedom and choices. Their challenge is to survive the freedom from constraints long enough to mature into the freedom to choose responsibility. Parents continue to influence the lives of students in a variety of ways, even though college policies exclude them from school-student communications. We inadvertently discovered some negative effects of this college policy that was intended to acknowledge students new adult status.

After initial regret for the loss of close and familiar relationships with high school teachers, and the occasional return visit to them, college students discover the pleasure of a more equal relationship with teachers. They value the relaxed, first-name basis of their interaction with college teachers, which they contrast with the more authoritarian "Yes, Sir" style of high school.

Teachers may be surprised to discover the importance that students attach to knowing others in their classes, but knowing other students is not just for fun, it is essential to adapting to and succeeding in college. High school and college representatives, the official information givers, provide generalities and generalizations. Other students are the aspiring college student's most sought and most valued sources of practical information. Other students can tell *"what's it like to be there."* These unofficial informants provide specific, anecdotal reports about particular courses, teachers, and assignments in language students can understand. The official and unofficial accounts of college life conflict in some ways. Officially, college is hard, many students fail. Unofficially, college is fun, you slack off, party. New students evaluate and assess these reports, taking into account what they know or believe about the sources, and construct their initial theories of correct college student behaviour. These aspects of student experience are explored in Information, part of Chapter 3.

One of the ways in which veteran students exercise their new maturity is by assuming the role of mentor to less experienced students. We have heard experienced students quizz and coach new students throughout the first semester. The most frequently given advice is, *"It's not hard if you just go to class, do the work."* We could briefly summarize many of our findings under these two headings: Obstacles to Going to Class, and Obstacles to Doing the Work (Figure 1).

We conclude the report with our individual reflections on ourselves and our efforts to effect changes within our institutions, Chapter 4. In addition to the changes we have implemented in our own classrooms, we recommend the following changes in policy and practice for the consideration for our college and high school colleagues.

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OBSTACLES TO GOING TO CLASS

- Believing that teachers don't care if you come to class. Students hear this from high school teachers, other students, even some college teachers.

- Long breaks between classes, which provide opportunity to go home or play pool in Ste-Anne.

- Long classes. Going from 50-minute class periods to one and a half hours or even three. The thought of sitting through hours of boredom makes skipping easy.

- Boring classes. Lectures (teacher talk) are boring. New college students don't know how to listen to teacher talk longer than 15 to 20 minutes. College is where they learn this.

- Attractions and distractions of competing activities. John Abbott is a social place. There are entertainers featured in the Agora *("A lot of times it seems like they don't want you to go to class. They've got all these things to do.")*; friends in the café or snack bar *("I drifted off about the middle of the semester; got caught up in the social thing.")*.

OBSTACLES TO DOING THE WORK

- Not knowing when to start. The pace of college is different from high school, where, (students say) you don't get down to work until October or November.

- Not knowing how to start. The assignments are larger, take longer, than those in high school, where teachers do more of the work planning and set smaller assignments. Used to having tasks divided into bite-sized chunks by their teachers, many students don't know "how to eat an elephant".

- Not knowing how to proceed - particularly in subjects or disciplines such as Humanities, which students have never even heard of before college.

- Nobody pushing you. Through high school most students are resisting doing the work, doing it under pressure and doing as little as necessary to get the grades they want.

- Not knowing how work will be evaluated. Students' finely honed knowledge of what high school teachers expect of them cannot be extrapolated to college teachers.

- Believing that everybody fails at college. Students who have little experience of failure at school come to college expecting to fail at least one course. *"I'vealways heard CEGEP is hard. If you don't fail, there's something wrong with you."*

- Getting "leftover courses" at registration, which students take because they are the only ones left that fit into the schedule. For students, the fact that they didn't choose a course, justifies not doing the work, not going to class, even failing.

- Taking too many courses: some programs require seven or eight. The workload in Pure and Applied Science is particularly daunting.

Figure 1

RECOMMENDATIONS

College Policies and Practices

1) Make first-semester students a college-wide priority. Providing students with a good base will make their work, and ours, easier in subsequent semesters.

2) Develop a semester-long program for new students that coordinates workshops in study skills, time management, and library usage with designated courses for first-semester students. The special courses should not be only study skills courses, or "University 101" courses on the University of North Carolina model, but regular content or discipline courses.

3) Encourage teachers in all disciplines to incorporate into existing courses the learning skills essential to the discipline ("learning to learn"). Recommend such courses to first-semester students in the College Calendar.

4) Encourage continuing contacts between high school and college teachers; e.g. "stages" for college teachers in high schools, visits to college classes by high school teachers (perhaps as a Pedagogical Day activity), and joint professional development activities.

5) Provide college teachers with training in cooperative learning and peer teaching methods. Students prefer this type of learning. It also offers a creative way for teachers to share the work in excessively large classes.

6) Prepare a video of different college classroom arrangements and teaching techniques. Such images would provide students, teachers, and counsellors a visual image of how college students and teachers act.

7) Provide a more experiential orientation: more doing, less telling. Extend orientation activities through at least half the first semester.

8) Coordinate the scheduling of college events for Grade Eleven students with Board-wide professional days and other events in the high school calendars.

9) Work with high schools to achieve a satisfactory compromise about giving students early or conditional acceptance to college. Grade Eleven is effectively terminated when these arrive in the mail.

10) Sponsor an exploratory study of parents' perceptions and concerns about college.

11) Include parents in a professional day activity.

12) Encourage first semester students to avoid three-hour classes.

OBSTACLES TO GOING TO CLASS

- Believing that teachers don't care if you come to class. Students hear this from high school teachers, other students, even some college teachers.

- Long breaks between classes, which provide opportunity to go home or play pool in Ste-Anne.

- Long classes. Going from 50-minute class periods to one and a half hours or even three. The thought of sitting through hours of boredom makes skipping easy.

- Boring classes. Lectures (teacher talk) are boring. New college students don't know how to listen to teacher talk longer than 15 to 20 minutes. College is where they learn this.

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11) Include parents in a professional day activity.

12) Encourage first semester students to avoid three-hour classes.

13) Avoid interventionist measures that diminish student autonomy or responsibility.

14) Examine the rationale for, and the effects of, the activities that take place in the Agora during mid-day.

15) Examine the policy for dropping courses: consider an earlier deadline for dropping and allowing students to replace dropped courses.

16) Run user-tests of publications which explain college requirements and registration procedures; rewrite them in language appropriate for a student audience rather than a bureaucratic one. Perhaps students in an English or Technical Writing class could take on this task.

17) Explore ways to make first-semester registration a less defeating experience; e.g., include in the registration packet the name and telephone number of a second-year "buddy" who can give one-to-one practical advice. Students who had such a friend or relative reported much more satisfying results. This may be especially important when telephone registration is implemented.

College Teacher Policies and Practices

18) Discover what it's like to be a college student: Arrange a "stage" to take courses offered by colleagues.

19) Remind yourself every semester that new students are young, (some only 16), scared, and need some encouragement and external motivation.

20) Provide variety and frequent change of pace in classes of more than one hour.

21) Encourage Departments to avoid the three-hour format for entry-level courses.

22) Negotiate classroom norms with students. Many students think it is acceptable to arrive late, leave early, miss class, and sleep, or eat during class. If your expectations are different, let them know.

23) Teach students what "office hours" are and how to use them.

24) Modify the "teachers don't care" perception and other beliefs that may prevent students from making use of teachers' office hours. Schedule brief appointments with all students during the first two weeks of the semester. Schedule them to come in pairs to lessen their anxiety in this new situation.

25) Establish the practice of providing ten minutes of consultation time before and after each class as a supplement to "office hours". Students report considerable difficulties using office hours.

26) Use first-semester students' priority for making new friends to establish class attendance as a habit. Lead "get acquainted" exercises the first day of class and a refresher the second day. If students have friends in class, they may be more motivated to come.

27) Respond to students' need to be "somebody" by learning and using their names in class and encouraging students to use other students' names in class discussions - no more referring to others as "he" or "she".

28) Make sure all students know at least one other student in the class. Assign partners, especially in classes where there are new and more senior students.

29) Review and rewrite course outlines in student-friendly language. Suggesting clarifications and improvements in the course outline could be the students' first assignment in any course.

30) Have students read and discuss the course outline in small groups on the first day of class. This allows students to get acquainted by working together, assures that they have read the outline at least once, and can diminish their anxiety. Students are dismayed when confronted by a description of *"all that work all at once,"* discussion can make clear that the work is not to be done all at once, but one step at a time.

31) Provide structured opportunities for students to talk in class, especially with each other. Make talking activities productive by allowing students to prepare for talking by focusing their ideas in a two-minute free-writing exercise or by preparing position statements in small groups.

32) Increase efforts to discover and use pedagogy appropriate to college students. College is not high school, but neither is it university. Our methods need to be appropriate for students at this immediate stage.

33) Use the motivation potential of students' enthusiasm for their new "adult" status and their desire to do well. Give early assignments with balanced criticism: what's right and what's wrong. Encourage as well as challenge.

34) For large assignments, provide instructions on how to start, guidelines for how to proceed, and feedback at early stages.

35) Provide active as well as passive learning experiences. The classes students find interesting are the ones in which they participate, the boring classes are those where they listen to the teacher lecture for one and a-half to three hours. Students experience long lectures as "babbling".

36) Let students know they are missed when they are absent.

37) Advise students how to practise "safe skipping": plan in advance, exchange telephone numbers with a class partner, check with partner for notes and assignments.

38) Develop relationships with high school teachers in your discipline; e.g. join or organize an Academic Alliances group.

High School Policies and Practices

39) Build incremental levels of student responsibility into the curriculum.

High School Teacher Policies and Practices

40) Give students gradual increases of responsibility for their own learning, particularly experience in making choices and meeting deadlines.

41) Negotiate responsibility contracts with students, e.g., they (not the teacher) are responsible for getting their daily homework done. Inform parents and principals of the pedagogical goals of this strategy.

42) Allow students to choose to do work, and when to do it: set seven quizzes or assignments, allow students to choose which five they will do.

43) Establish firm due dates that have real consequences. Explain the purpose of these to students and their parents.

44) Give Grade Eleven students guided free time, as preparation for college freedom.

45) Find ways to motivate Grade Eleven students, other than threats of failure at college or other scare tactics; e.g. "college teachers won't care about you." Try: "College teachers won't push you, you have to learn to push yourself."

46) Visit college classes during pedagogical days and after 2:30. Faculty Professional Development Service (457-6610, ext. 386) can arrange this with a teacher in your discipline.

47) Develop relationships with college teachers in your discipline; e.g. join or organize an Academic Alliances group.

CHAPTER 1 - LOOKING AHEAD

The move from high school to college is but one of many transitions along the educational pipeline. The move to college continues two trends: joining larger groups and institutions, and experiencing less personal relationships with teachers. We describe some ways in which high school personnel prepare students for college. One way involves what we call scare tactics. Teachers, counsellors, etc. present an image of tough, uncaring college teachers and use this image to motivate Grade Eleven students to work harder, and to work with less pushing by teachers. This tough talk is contradicted by the reports students hear from their peers; students say it is less effective than providing specific experiences, which are similar to college work methods, such as allowing students to take responsibility for completing and verifying homework, and seeking, rather than resisting, help from teachers. The chapter concludes with a college teacher reflecting the image of high schools that was derived from interviews and visits: a more structured environment, where teachers are both caring and controlling and where teachers, more than students, assume responsibility for getting students to do their work.

1.1 When Does the Transition Begin?

The transition from high school to college is but one of many that students make as they continue through the education pipeline. At each stage of the journey, the new institution seems larger and less personal, the teacher more distant. In Kindergarten when the student scrapes her knee, the teacher is likely to hug and comfort her. But shortly, there is the transition to Grade One. The class is more organized, the work more structured, the discipline more apparent.

When they move into this new setting, students must learn to sit still, keep quiet, not wander around: i.e. conform to the behavioural norms of the new place. In elementary school, children spend most of the day in one classroom, at one desk, with one group of classmates, and with one teacher. They develop again the sense of belonging that they had in Kindergarten.

Then they move on to high school and must learn to cope with larger numbers of people and a new set of norms.

> *The change was very different. Now you have to switch classes. You're also allowed to chew gum, but you always have homework. I have six teachers.*

The first step in the transition is learning to know the other transients.

> *After two weeks I felt like I had been there before. The first day I remember clearly. I remember waiting outside with all the other grade eights. Some I knew, some I didn't. The next day, Orientation Day, was fun and I met a lot more people by the games. Now school is fun and normal.*

Yet even a Grade Eight student can look ahead to that time when they will move on.

> *I'm sure that by the time I have to leave [this school] I'll be excited to go and see that huge John Abbott just waiting for me to come and get lost in.*

For many, this expectation is fulfilled.

> *You go from Grade Eleven to a grade where everybody is in the same kind of grade, and that's going from 200 to 5000 so you turn into a nobody.*

The new college student can put this transition to the more grown up environment with its greater challenges and rewards into perspective.

> *Well the funny thing is that going from elementary school and then high school, the very first day, every single year, you'd be, like, terrified. Every single year and, you know, you've been going to the same high school for five years but still you're so scared the first day. You don't know what to wear, you don't know what to do and you don't know how to act. When I came here, I felt like, who cares, I've been doing it so much, it's just another school, another year.*

Yet some do not make this transition successfully. Their confident expectation that this will be just another change like the others is unfounded. No longer restrained by enforced attendance *("locks on the doors, bars on the windows")* and kept on course by vigilant teachers and parents *("looking over their shoulders")*, they drift away.

> *I think all high school students start off with the attitude of coming to CEGEP and doing well, but it's after the first few weeks and, you know, you're with your friends and you see all the activities going on, you know, it sort of lures you away from your work.*

Those who survive this transition can look onward to the greater challenge, the greater isolation, and the distant and uncaring professor or employer who they see ahead when they think about university or full-time employment.

1.2 How the High Schools Prepare Students for College

When the students reach the last year of high school, both parents and teachers remind them that the next year of schooling will be different. Students are cautioned that they must become more responsible for themselves because the "teachers at college won't care" about their homework, missed assignments, class attendance or failure.

> *The attitude that the [high school] teachers gave me, like, you have to do this in college and it's going to be so tough. Nobody cares about you in college.*

High school teachers and counsellors use the image of the tough, uncaring college teacher in a final attempt to motivate their students to work.

> *All through high school our teachers told us that we were going to fail in CEGEP because we knew nothing and we wrote our papers wrong, and that they were really mean out here [at college].*

> *They sort of tell you that it's going to be hard but they don't tell you how. They tell you the failure rate in CEGEP first-year Chemistry was 50 or 60%. That was a nice thing to hear! That wasn't too encouraging. I guess they have to give you a little scare to let you know what it's going to be like.*

Students are told by teachers, counsellors, and parents that they will be entering a world where the work will be much harder and they will be on their own, without anyone checking up on them. However, students often perceive this as a ploy to make them do more work than they are prepared to do; the admonitions fall upon deaf ears and old habits persist through the last year of high school. Most students don't take these admonitions seriously because neither teacher, counsellor, nor parent attended college, at least not recently. Not surprisingly, students give little credence to their information.

> *The teacher from high school is explaining it, it's not convincing. You kind of think, well, they don't really know. They've gone through it a long time ago and it's not what it's like now.*

> *I suppose they [the teachers] haven't been here, taught here. They've seen the school often maybe but not more than we have. They've been by or heard about it. So there's not always too much they can do.*

The scare tactics may not be effective at motivating students to work in high school. Yet new students carry with them the belief that the college teachers will not care whether they are present in class, turn in assignments, or even pass or fail.

The high school practice of pushing students to work is seen by students alternately as caring, smothering, and bullying:

> *I kind of miss the fact that the teachers care if you're doing bad or not...the fact that they care.*

> *It seems like if you get a bad mark it's always, like, the teacher's business in high school, like, they're always influencing you. It's, like, you did bad - do better or else! Here, it's more up to you.*

> *I had some very strict teachers and they'd sort of intimidate you to do your work...you had to do your work.*

The high schools seek alliances with parents as they attempt to motivate all students to complete at least a minimum of work.

> *When I was in high school, let's say you would fail a test or you would do poorly in school. The teacher would phone home...parents more involved in your schooling.*

Some students experienced evaluation of their performance in high school as quite different from that in college.

> *In high school...I don't know, the teacher will pass you even though you're a hopeless case. You know, no teacher will give a seven per cent to a student in high school because they feel sorry, and it goes on their record, and they really don't want it.*
>
> **And here?**
>
> *Yes! They see you show no interest in the course, you don't want to work and it's: "There's your mark, that's what you've got and there you have it!"*

Students reported that certain differences between high school and college practices made the transition difficult.

> *In a way I wasn't prepared for it from high school. Right up until the end you really just.... One thing is I think high school teachers should, especially in Grade Eleven, should put more responsibility on the students. ...now it's a lot harder on you.*
>
> *The high schools should try to make them [high school students] more responsible for their education. Especially, [my one] teacher, if you missed a test, you know, I could always [make it up]. Here, you can't.*
>
> *If you don't get it [an assignment] in, no lates, tough luck. Whereas in high school it was, I brought it in three weeks late and she takes off five marks..., so you have to be careful.*
>
> *Here [at college] they'd give you a deadline and you have to meet the deadline and there [at high school] they're constantly pushing you.... I'm still snapping out of it.*
>
> *I had a project due in the second week that I was there [at college] and they just kind of put it at you too fast. Usually in high school you don't work until at least October or November.*

One high school guidance counsellor also felt that the high school should be:

> Giving more of the responsibility to the students...allowing them, if something goes wrong, to suffer the consequences, to take away some of the cushions that we provide.

While a student expressed the idea as follows:

> *I think the high school should stop coddling kids so much...you're dropped into it.*
>
> *It would be a lot better to know what's going to hit you ahead of time.*

As you might expect, students advocated "get tough" policies only in retrospect. Closer to high school, the students we interviewed during their first month at college were reluctant to say more should have been required of them.

Students consistently reported that preparing papers and assignments for which the due date was set long in advance was hard for them. In high school, teachers work so hard at getting all students to hand in these assignments that sometimes the intended meaning of a deadline disappears. Teachers, who must account to parents and administrators for each student's performance, abhor the blank spaces in the mark record books; and students reported many instances of teachers who went to extraordinary efforts to extract work from them.

> *In high school they [teachers] come to you. They say, look you haven't done well.... Here you don't go to your teacher then that's it.*

From their new perspective as college students, the high school teachers chasing after them seemed *"kinda dumb"*. However, students spoke positively about high school teachers who tried to teach them to take on responsibilities by *"demanding a lot. Making sure things got in by deadlines, and there were no exceptions."*

> *Well, my teachers in high school.... In my last year of high school I was in a lot of advanced classes. And they thought enough about us to try and prepare us. I found that helped a lot.*
>
> *I think he treated us like adults, which I think was the preparation for CEGEP, and I really think it helped...other teachers would treat you more or less like their little students and you felt you were still young and you weren't responsible enough to move on.*

Students reported that experiences such as checking their own practice problems, by verifying their solutions with a set of solutions posted in the school corridor and then asking the teacher about any difficulties, were useful preparation for college work.

Students are more comfortable feeling that their teachers - high school or college - care about them and their progress. Students, who understand that the big step in preparing for college is not necessarily to take on a greater workload but, rather, to work in a different way, may be more willing to work with their high school teachers at developing the habits and skills that will be of service to them in college.

> *The only thing I can think of is encouraging better study habits and getting into the process, so it's like second nature to study or do your work, so you don't fall apart when you come here.*

One student spoke of a teacher who would only occasionally check that the homework was done. It seems that if the students believed that a practice was designed to help them in their next year and not associated with punishment, then it was better received.

> *That was when I started realizing how to do things on my own. Like about checking homework, nobody checks homework here really, unless you have to hand it in. But in high school, all the teachers check your homework. They check that you did it, which is kind of dumb. What my teacher did was once in a while he'd go around checking but not really to come down on you or to give you a zero on it, but just to have the chance to give you a lecture.... "Nobody's going to come around checking your homework to motivate you to do it. Look, you've got to do your homework and not because I'm going to check it, but because you ought to know it." That's when I started noticing that I had to do my homework on my own.... I found out the hard part: being motivated to do the work on your own without someone there. There are some things you have to do even if nobody's going to notice you did it except yourself.*

1.3 Institutional Characteristics: High school

In the Québec school system, students graduate from Grade Eleven high school at the average age of 17. Many subsequently continue their studies at a Collège d'enseignement général et professionnel (Cégep). Both institutions come under the Ministry of Education; still, there is surprisingly little contact between the two institutions, either on the administrative level or on a more individual level. Many college teachers are unfamiliar with Québec high schools (some did not even attend a North American high school) and are therefore ignorant about the milieu their students come from. The colleges were instituted in 1967, when most of the current high school teachers had already completed their post-secondary education. The result is that many high school teachers find it difficult to prepare their students for a world they themselves know little about: the two milieus are quite different. A high school teacher and research team member observed:

> **Although the school I work in is literally a stone's throw from the college, the two institutions are as different as night and day.**

The differences lead to misunderstandings, distrust, even hostility, when there ought to be cooperation and regular communication.

One of the aims of this project was to allow teacher-researchers to become familiar with the "other world". College teachers would visit the high schools, sitting in on classes, and interviewing students, teachers, and administrators; high school teacher-researchers would study the college milieu. This enabled the college teachers to hold up for the high school teachers a mirror for self-reflection; and the high school teachers to hold a mirror for the college teachers.

This account is thus and attempt by a college teacher-researcher to reflect the image of the high schools, as seen from a series of visits to the classrooms, and from talks with students and high school personnel.

The Grade Eleven students at high school are ready "to move on".

What would be the most exciting part of it [leaving high school] do you think?

I don't know. Just changing from high school to college is the most exciting.

New place?

Yeah, a new place, new surroundings.

You would like to stay here for another year?

I wouldn't mind it. It wouldn't bother me but it's just that it's time to go and move on.

When you think ahead what is the most scary thing?

Again, the same thing, is like going from high school to college.

It has two sides to it.

To the graduating students, high school has *"two sides to it"*. It is a cosy place where they are used to *"walking down the corridor knowing 80% of the people"* and *"being friendly with the teachers, knowing them almost like friends."* High school, by now, also feels to them *"a bit like jail"*. They are referred to as "kids" and, they feel they are treated like kids.

> ***In high school...they kind of treat you like a kid. You're 17 in Grade Eleven, and they act like you're ten years old. Like, 'Don't forget your pencil.' Stuff like that.***

It is clear to the students that it is the "teacher's job" to watch out for them.

> *Well, I think the high school teachers are a lot...not that they're more concerned, it's just that...I mean, I guess, it's their job. You know it's high school and they have to watch out for the kids and make sure.... Like, I remember when I didn't do well, they'd phone my house and say, "Listen, you know, she's not doing that well. What's wrong?" They want you to pass so they phone home and they say, 'What's going on with her or him? She's not doing that well.'*

The teachers are held accountable to school administrators as well as to the parents, not only for a student's presence at school, but also for the student's work and progress. *"They want you to pass,"* as a student expressed it. In the words of a high school teacher:

> **There's a responsibility more to the parent and to the community that says, well, if the students are not handing assignments in, then you will do something about it... That you will call home or do whatever you can rather than simply give a zero. So, our policy has always been that you do whatever you can to get the assignment from the student and you do not give zeros. One student said to me, "In high school it's the teacher that gets you through."... That's the perception and, boy, we'd like to change that perception because we do a lot of pulling. We really do.**

Teachers speak about "pulling", "prodding", and "disciplining" students to get them to work. Students' imagery of high school is of caring teachers who are always "chasing after" them, "hanging over" them, "on their backs." As a result, some students learn to manipulate teachers by playing a "tug-of-war" game about their work (see *Easing the Transition Research* Report 4). Threats of failure seldom materialize, as the high schools are doing everything in their power to help the students to pass and get promoted. A high school teacher expressed it:

> *The high schools will not let the kids fail. They pump them through one year after another and they've come to expect that.*

A student who has not completed an assignment may be given "detention" and required to complete the work under supervision; but he will not be given zero. The ultimate threat is to "tell your parents." A threat that a recently matured 18 year-old assessed in this way:

> *I find a lot of them now so childish. We go [there and] these kids are throwing other kids around. Sixteen-year olds. When I was sixteen, I never did that. The teacher caught you, grabbed you by the ear and they take you to the office, and call your parents. Nowadays it's, "Call my parents, I don't care." When I was in Grade Ten and Eleven, if someone called your parents it was, "Oh, my God she's going to be so."... Now, they don't care. Kids do not care at all.*

Do you think if in your Grade Eleven classes if teachers pulled back a bit from the students, do you think that would prepare them better?

Yeah, a bit. Teachers always threatened, I'll tell your parents. That doesn't scare the kids. But if you say you're not going to graduate and you're not going to do anything in life because you need a high school diploma to get any kind of job. That's when the kid: "Oh, my God" and they straighten out and they start working. But you threatened to call the parents and that's all they do in any kind of school: "We'll tell your parents." Give me a break. Half of them don't have parents. It's not the kids' fault. But they should think more about what the kids are thinking of instead of: "Well, this has always done it." Times have changed.

The high school teachers are in a difficult position. Many told us that they would like to "teach them to see the consequences of their own behaviour," as one teacher put it, but they felt powerless in the face of demands from most parents and administrators to "pump" the students through.

The pace of learning appears slow (to a teacher used to the 15-week semester of the college). The high school students told us they do not have to work hard to get through. One student accomplished this task while holding down a full-time job.

What about the work load? Do you have to work hard here?

I don't. The only thing I really take home is math homework but the other stuff I just do in class and do a little bit at lunch but I really have no homework. (This student later mentioned that he worked 40 hours a week in an outside job.)

Furthermore, the mission of the high school is not only academic, as one teacher reminded us:

I have to consider that the school itself has an atmosphere, and at times I come up against this atmosphere. By atmosphere I mean that the school structures a student by not only academic but also the extra-curricular activities.

How would you describe the atmosphere here?

The atmosphere here...it's loose. They want the students to get involved in as many things as possible. At times I feel that academics is not a priority.

The lasting image from these high school visits is the dedication and competence of teachers, many of whom feel limited in what they can achieve by institutional restrictions and practices.

CHAPTER 2 - BEING THERE

John Abbott College, as seen by a high school teacher is a relaxed, less-structured atmosphere where both students and teachers function with fewer rules. A vibrant social scene is intermingled with classes. Extrapolating expectations from high school to college leads to confusion. First Weeks summarizes students' experiences during their first weeks at college, when the differences between high school and college are most vividly problematic.

2.1 Institutional Characteristics: College

For many students, the first impression of the college is that, physically, it is big. It is big in terms of the space it occupies, the facilities it maintains, and the number of people affiliated with it - both students and employees. In comparison to the high school milieu, the college appears to operate with fewer budget constraints, to offer many more facilities and services, and generally, to function in a much different manner. Students speak highly of the library and its services, the sports facilities, and the many student services available. To a high school teacher the science laboratory facilities are Nirvana!

It would not be accurate to equate the college to a very large high school. More striking than the size of the building or the large numbers of teachers and students, is the enormity of the expectations, set by the college, of its students. In order to meet the requirements of their large course load (seven, eight, sometimes even nine courses), students must shoulder for the first time the responsibility for self-discipline and self-motivation, within a relaxed and unstructured environment. Students describe this as *"so much FREEDOM!"*

The absence of a bell ringing to mark the change of class, the absence of the intercom voice, and the absence of the teachers monitoring behaviour contribute to the more relaxed atmosphere.

> *I don't miss the teachers taking attendance. I don't miss people making sure that you do everything. I don't miss people treating you like you're a little kid and can't do anything by yourself. I don't miss having notes when you're sick.*
>
> *I don't miss the school bell, I don't miss some of the teachers there, I don't miss the principal, because you'd be in contact with him everyday, because he'd be down in the cafeteria - I don't miss the caf food... I don't miss the regular, every single day, going to the same class, and having homework for every day.*

Students and teachers function in their roles in the less structured environment. Students run clubs and extra-curricular activities, often without teacher advisors. Live rock music emanates from the Agora, while classes meet elsewhere.

> *The first week there were rock bands in the school - in the Agora. What is this place, school or a concert? I found that weird. Now I just walk past, and if there's a rock band there, it's no big deal anymore, it's the freedom they give you.*

Students are free to decide whether to attend their class or enjoy the rock bands. In contrast to the high school, college students are not in classes all the time, nor are they required to be in class.

> *When you walk into class some of the teachers will say: "You know, I don't really care if you come to class or not. If you don't come then that's your problem." That's probably the hardest change. If you have a class and all your friends are going somewhere, to Annies, or whatever, you can go with them or you can go to your Introduction to Poetry class, or whatever. That's tough - you have to make decisions. In high school it's like they lock the doors and: "You're not getting out of here." It's like bars on the windows. Here it's really up to you. That's the hardest thing.*

Students meet in groups at socially "correct" locations.

> *[My friends] told me where to go so I wouldn't be looking around, you know. They showed me a little map of the school so I wouldn't get totally lost, and they told me the type of people to hang around there and there and there. There are sort of types of people that hang around, but they don't really care like if you want to hang around there too. I find, in the Munchbox, it's a lot of really preppy people worrying about their clothes and stuff. I find a lot of them there. I'm friends with them anyway and I still go there sometimes. The Triangle is very hippie people - the little Triangle there near the Munchbox. The Oval is just, well everyone is just sort of casual there. There's a few hippies in there. That's classifying too, but I'm just classifying by the way they dress. It doesn't have anything to do with their personalities.*

Sometimes, these are the places to be rather than in classes.

In the classroom, the teaching methods seem different. Students describe some teachers as "lecturing" more, or being less apt to deal with student's questions in class time. Students encounter the concept of "office hours": a contractual time in which the college teacher expects students to come with questions not dealt with in class time.

> *I was telling him [my friend]: This is CEGEP and you're supposed to go to the teacher.... He's supposed to.... If you're having problems, go see the teacher after class. The class is just lecture and you go and ask him for help afterwards. It's not like they're babying after you. Nobody actually realizes that. It's a big thing. My Math teacher last semester was saying, "Okay, this class 40% of you guys failed. Two people came to see me and that's not*

> *good. You should all come to see me even people who are getting 90's just to ask about problems."*

In high school, students perceive "extra help" given by a teacher during the teacher's lunch or after school hours as an "extra" service. Arriving at college with this expectation, students sometimes speak of their college teachers as *"not minding if they come and ask questions"* or *"not minding helping"*, confusing the two practices.

> *Or you feel like they don't want to - not that they don't want to help you. But that they have other things to do. Like, they go to their office and they want to relax, and they're drinking their coffee, and they just don't want to be bugged. They're not in class. You know, there are some teachers that I find are like that. I don't bother.*

The college teacher presents material to students who choose to attend that class. There are fewer disruptions, such as dealing with forgotten absence notes, forgotten texts, notes, or pens that force a teacher to discipline students. And yet, students talk of leaving a class before it ends, coming in late, sleeping in the back.

> **With teachers that don't take attendance, how does that work?**
>
> *Well, I have [one] course and you have to hand in a paper every week and after that, you just discuss it. It's a three-hour class and it goes to 5:30. A lot of times, I leave in the middle of it, just because, to me, it seems like a waste of time.*

***

> **What do you mean by discipline? What kind of things do you find different?**
>
> *I guess, like tardiness. In high school you have to be in class at 8:45 or 9:00. If you don't, you have to get a late slip, detention or whatever. Here you can come and walk into class - or at least in my classes - you can walk in ten minutes late, half an hour late; as long as you do your work, or whatever. If you don't want to come in, don't come in. Of course, we all know that, if you miss two classes, you're expelled from the class. Basically, you're kicked out of class.*

It is different and it is the same.

The college teacher, in comparison to a high school colleague, does not appear to be obligated to answer directly to a parent, a department head, or a principal. Yet, the teacher in the college feels the same sense of despair when faced with class failure rates, missed deadlines, and a student's repeated absences.

College is very different from high school. An absent teacher may cancel a class; the usual practice in high school is to provide a substitute teacher. It serves a different clientèle: older students who usually have reached the age of majority; students who have passed through the academic selection process of high school. The college atmosphere is unburdened with the rules and structures that are enforced in high schools, where a younger and, academically, more diverse student population requires closer supervision. Consequently, the college is a more relaxed environment, in which the young person who has chosen further education is expected to be a responsible, self-motivated learner within a less structured system.

2.2 John Abbott's a Social Place

High school students hear conflicting messages about what John Abbott is, and about what to expect when they arrive there.

As we have seen, they are likely to hear from their high school teachers that college will be hard, that they won't be looked after, and that they will have to do their work on their own.

From their friends who are already there, they hear other messages:

> *You mention John Abbott to everybody and they say, Oh, it's a country club. Part of it might have to do with its location. You've got the Pool Hall five minutes away from here, and there's Annies down there.*

Information from friends does not dwell on academic concerns.

> *The reason they do that, I think, is because they're being, just too cool, sort of thing, to tell me. Well, this is how it is, and there's essay forms, and the classes are harder, and I did a paper the other day on the civil war.... I can't see them sitting down and telling me things like that.... [instead it is] "Ah...tomorrow's Friday and I have the day off"...that's what they're interested in telling me and I won't ask them about the scholastic part of CEGEP.*

> *At our school, it was past graduates. You know, they'd come back and you ask: "So, how's John Abbott? Is it hard?" "No, it's a joke. I never go to class." It's almost like a power trip that you're still in high school, and they're not, and they're trying to impress you.*

Students arrive with two conflicting expectations. College will be hard, college will be fun. They have to resolve, for themselves, this contradiction.

> *It's just not something that you can be explained: how to change or how to go into it; but I think talking about it especially makes it a lot easier. And not with a counsellor because so many times your guidance counsellor in high school will say, "Well in CEGEP you have to be prepared to work on your*

own." That doesn't hit you because what you're listening to is the people coming back from past graduating classes saying, "Ah, it's a party, man, you go and slack off." I think you have to get the students to tell the truth.

For many, emphasis on social life in college is a natural progression from high school. The final year, and particularly the final term, of high school are dominated by social activities. Graduation is the planning of the clothes to be worn, the limousine to be rented, the raising of money to pay for the parties and dances. Grades usually decline from the second to the last term of high school: after students receive their conditional acceptance from the college, academic work takes a back seat to social activities. The "conditional" of the conditional acceptance to college is not taken seriously. Provincial exams are a sobering event; however, Grade Eleven students did not speak about them in the interviews. After a summer away from school, the slack attitude of the last weeks of high school is carried into the start of college.

What do the students find when they first get to John Abbott?

I don't know how I'm going to get any work done, there's a concert on, there's movies every Friday, there's girls to look at...it's as if they don't want you to go to class.

There's always something happening at the Agora, which you can easily stand around and just watch. It's good for people if they have nothing to do and there's some entertainment.

Through John Abbott Student Activities, an appealing range of entertainment is provided for students during the first weeks and through the semester. The assumptions behind this practice are that students involved in college life are more likely to succeed, and that college life should be "well rounded", (i.e. not just academic). Student Activities also sponsors a wide variety of intra- and inter-mural sports. Most of the entertainments take place in the Agora, a large open space that can be adapted to many purposes. The Agora activities provide students, particularly those easily tempted, with an excuse for missing classes.

I think all high school students start off with the attitude of coming to CEGEP and doing well; but it's after the first few weeks and, you know, you're with friends and you see all the activities going on and, you know, it sort of lures you away from work.

The college also provides places for student social life. In addition to a cafeteria and a snackbar, there is a student-run café.

The first week - it seems like you are not at school. You are at a place with your friends and you're having fun. Like when I first walked into the Oval, like, I couldn't believe it.

Oh, really. That's a café.

> *Yeah. I couldn't believe that it was a school.*

What do students find when they attend their first classes? Not usually such an enticing variety of activities.

> *I remember my first day very well because I wasn't expecting only five minutes of class for one thing. They only give you the plan d'étude and all that.*

A quite different message about the importance of class time is communicated when the first two-hour class *"went for the whole time, right to the last minute!"*, and when students are told that four absences will result in failure.

One new-student task is to achieve a balance between school as a social place and school as an academic place. Some achieve this early.

> *It is [a social place] but you can't let it get to you. I was worried about that; when I first came here because I heard it, so I kind of kept under control.*

For others however,

> *It's a total social club. It's so amazing! Dad will pay my tuition and I'm gone. Bye! Some people went for the fun of it.*

Successful students achieve a balance between work and play.

> *You should work, I mean whoever says it's a party? It's fun and it's a great place to be. I enjoy the campus and it's a great setting. Perfect. But...here it's like if you're the class clown, it's ta taaa! People are more mature.*

2.3 First Weeks

> *You don't hang around with the grade nines when you're in Grade Eleven; in Grade Eleven there's only, like, 200 people in each class, we'll say. Here you come to a college; everybody is the same; you go from Grade Eleven to a grade where everybody is in the same kind of grade and that's going from 200 to 5000, so you turn into a nobody.*

New college students feel like "nobodies". In June, they were the senior students in their schools. Everyone knew them. In September, their place in the world has changed.

> *So I was really introduced to a new world where I knew nobody and nobody knew me - I was used to a lifestyle of walking into a place and knowing 80% of the people and talking to 80%. Coming to John Abbott, it was, 'Where is everybody?' I felt a bit out of place. I guess a lot of people would in a*

> *school of 5000 students--I'd find myself thinking, I want to go, I want to leave. I just wanted to go to classes. I felt lonesome. I felt really out of place.*

The pace of college life is fast.

> *It was really hectic. Everything was going so fast. It was like: "Oh, my God, I have a class now, and I have break, and I'd better eat," etc. And it was really fast. It was too fast. It was like going in a circle.*

> *Oh, it was really hectic. I remember I was always under so much pressure. And then I just didn't feel like I belonged at first. Like I said, I didn't want to be there at first. So I just wouldn't give it a chance. Like, it wasn't the school, really, it was me.*

The size of the new institution is intimidating, and the new student's fear of getting lost is valid.

> **If you can think back to the first few weeks you were here, what do you remember about that?**

> *Totally lost. Like, the first day I was so nervous coming to school. I got in and had my print-out of where my classes were; like HO, or whatever. I had no idea where to go. I was totally lost because the campus is so big.*

A transition from familiar surroundings into a strange and unfamiliar world should be accompanied by a feeling of being "out of place", especially when moving from a smaller to a much larger institution. Grade Eight students, new to high school, voice similar sentiments about leaving the familiar elementary schools for the new world of high school. Although they have previously moved from one school to the next, they have usually moved along as a group: friendship bonds and their own group identities are kept intact. However, new college students are on an individual track. For the first time in their lives, they are entering a truly individual study program - no one else in the college is taking exactly the same courses, with the same teachers, or exactly the same schedule.

> *I guess the school is kind of intimidating. At least to me it was; if you don't know anybody in your program.*

The feeling of isolation is compounded by the presence of crowds everywhere.

> *I came in and it was completely crowded the first day. You can't get to the water fountain. You can't get to the library because you have to wade through.*

Students told us they often escaped outside during the first weeks, just to sit alone in the sun: *"Nowhere do you feel so alone as in a crowd of strange faces, where everybody else seems to know someone."* There are few places where the new student without friends can feel comfortable alone. The library is one such place. *"You can go to the library alone. That's a great place to meet people."*

The space around their lockers becomes their personal territory. One student described, how in the beginning, she used to sit by her locker during her breaks, feeling totally alone.

> **Could you have gone to the student lounge to meet some people?**
>
> *You don't go to the student lounge alone; you go there with your friends.*

At high school they often had a close relationship with their teachers.

> *It's a lot more impersonal, and that's hard to get used to. You're used to being almost friendly with the teachers: knowing them all.*
>
> *I'm so used to, in high school...being really close to the teachers...and not knowing them not only as teachers, but also as people and friends, and knowing more about them.*

But, *"at college,"* the high school students believe, *"The teachers don't care."*

> **Why do you think they don't?**
>
> *Because, they don't check your homework, they don't ask you for your assignment, and if you don't go to class, they don't call your parents. So, they don't care.*

New college students do not expect they will be able to develop close bonds with college teachers.

> *The teachers [at college] don't look at each student separately, it's just a whole.*
>
> *I'd be a little shy, you know, to knock on their door.*
>
> **Because you don't know them?**
>
> *Yeah, I don't know them as well. Sometimes you ask yourself, like, if they'd recognize your face even. Because, I mean you're such a big class.*

However painful the loosening of old bonds may be, students also talk about the first weeks at college as a time for shedding old identities and getting a new start.

> *Well, people, they don't know you here and I found, like, sometimes when you've been in high school for five years with the same people, and those people know you, and they have a clear picture of who you are and what you*

> *are like, and when you come to CEGEP the first time you are starting over, because you don't know anyone really. And you are starting over and making new friends, and they see you a certain way. It gives you a chance to not change yourself really, but...I mean, sure, I think everyone, they regret, you know, things they have done in the past.*
>
> Sure, sure.
>
> *You know, they've had bad experiences with some friends and sort of situations and here it's like everything is forgotten, and you are starting over because people see the good things in you, and they don't know the bad.*
>
> It gives you a second chance.
>
> *It does. I think it's nice starting over again, like socially and academically.*

The new place seems scary, but it is also full of excitement and opportunities.

> *It was scary, I guess, in a way because you're in a different environment; but I loved it and I felt like such an individual. I felt like you're on your own, really, and you can do what you want.*

The atmosphere is different from their old familiar school. Students actually sit here and want to learn.

> *People are easy going, it's a kind of relaxed atmosphere.*
>
> *I actually think about my work. It's scary.*

The first four to six weeks are a crucial time - that's when the students start to establish their college identity: when they start to acquire a sense of who they are, and a feeling of comfort in their new environment. Being known by and knowing other students in their classes contributes to their feeling of comfort.

> *The first one or two classes, just taking 15 minutes to talk to other students, maybe give a project where they have to socialize with other students in the class to get more at ease about the situation...*

The students also frequently raise the issue of teachers' knowing and not knowing their names. In a new environment and in a new role, identity is fragile. It is not surprising, then, that being known by your name by other students and by your teachers helps to reinforce that fragile identity.

> *It's very hard to go down the hallway and say "Hi" to a teacher, and most of the time you end up embarrassing yourself because he doesn't remember your name or doesn't remember who you are, because they teach so many students and have so many classes, and there are so many students in the school that*

> *I don't blame them, for sure. I miss that. The first semester I found myself doing that and then I realized that I should stop because it doesn't look too good when you say "Hi" to a teacher and he just says "Hi", but it looks as if he doesn't know who you are.*

New students are often carried away on a wave of excitement and great expectations. They are learning their way around, and they are making new friends. They find that they can skip a few classes here and there, without suffering any immediate consequences. Although they sometimes look back fondly on their high school days, they generally feel it's a world they have now outgrown.

> *I feel like I can do my own thing and it's my responsibility...in high school, they really get on your back.*

They enjoy being treated as adults, but realize that the college, with its social activities, brings temptations they did not have to deal with in high school.

> *You've just got to learn how to handle it [the freedom]. You can't take it for granted or anything. You need that, cause, I mean, if you didn't then it would be a bit like high school, you'd think of it as a jail a bit.*

They are often given the freedom to attend classes or not, but...

> *In the first week, we found out that we could miss a certain number of classes. So, I tested it out, and I guess I didn't do too well.*

For some students the temptations are just too great.

> *I stopped going to all my classes.... So, I just kind of blew my semester.... I'm used to teachers yelling at you and telling you that if you miss one more class, "I'm calling your parents." They didn't do that there [at college].*
>
> **When you say it all caught up with them, what happened?**
>
> *Well, as I said, they would have skipped either one too many classes and not have realized it, and that would constitute a failure, or they might not have done the work or something like that. They don't realize it at the time, but all of a sudden they've failed and they can't understand why.*

New college students have difficulties assessing their own progress. College feels so different to them, and they have heard so many gloomy statistics about failure, that they wonder how they will do. At college, the rules, expectations, teaching styles, and methods of evaluation differ from class to class. They struggle to discover how much studying is enough. If they start off strong, they may slack off when the first marks exceed their standards.

First semester students all told us, initially, that everything was going well.

How are things going for you so far?

Good, pretty good.

It was only as they continued talking that it became apparent that their transitions might not be going smoothly.

How did you miss a class?

Well, Friday morning I woke up late so I missed my whole morning, and we had a test that day so I'll fall behind on that.

What did this student do when difficulties arose? Returned to the comfortable old high school.

So, when did you go back to see your high school teacher?

Last Friday, when I woke up!

The student continued to see a high school teacher as the first source of help.

What would you do if you had a little bit of trouble?

I'd probably go to see my teacher at school.

In high school?

He told me he'd help out a lot. I'd probably go and see him.

This student said he was doing *"pretty good;"* however, missing an examination is an indication of trouble. When trouble arose, the first impulse was to go back to the familiar milieu of high school and seek help there.

We asked the second semester students to respond to the following question: Thinking back on your first semester...what did you feel was a high point - when you felt especially good? More often than not the answer was: *"When I got back that test and I had done really well."* Also, as an answer to the question: "What was the low point of the semester?", we often heard from students: *"When I failed that assignment."*

It has come as a surprise that receiving a good mark was so frequently cited as the "high point" of the semester by the students. Maybe we felt that many students are not concerned with their progress. They seem to have so many other interests that take priority over studying. *"My work* [job, not school education] *takes time, my girlfriend takes time, my travelling takes time,"* said one student. Studying was not even mentioned as "taking time".

For most students, good marks are the only reward for hard work. Early successes helped them shape a new identity, especially, if marks were accompanied by a positive comment from the teacher.

[Have there been] any really good times?

Yeah, there have been assignments that I have done perfect. The teachers have recognized it and they've come up to me and said, "Good work!"

That makes you feel good.

Yeah.

Sure.

I think here, the bad times you have are...you know...there are, like, good and bad times and the good make up for the bad times when you are struggling.

As long as you have both.

Yeah. I don't know what you would do if it was all downhill!

Students who are experiencing their first semester as "all downhill" find it difficult to persist in their studies. Some write off the semester as a loss and plan to start afresh in the second semester, drawing on their hard-learnt experience.

Are things going better for you?

I wouldn't consider last semester my first semester, I consider this my first semester.

CHAPTER 3 - LOOKING BACK

High school students' descriptions of what they think college will be like and how it might be different from high school are vague, undetailed. The clearest pictures of the first-semester student experience emerged from the reflections of second-semester students. In Chapter 3, we summarize veteran students' perspectives on their transition, in which two words reverberate: freedom and choices. Their challenge is to survive the freedom from constraints long enough to mature into the freedom to choose responsibility. Parents continue to influence the lives of students in a variety of ways, even though college policies exclude them from school-student communications. We describe some negative effects of this college policy that was intended to acknowledge students new adult status.

After initial regret for the loss of close and familiar relationships with high school teachers, and the occasional return visit to them, college students discover the pleasure of a more equal relationship with teachers. They value the relaxed, first-name basis of their interaction with college teachers, which they contrast with the more authoritarian "Yes, Sir" style of high school.

Teachers may be surprised to discover the importance that students attach to knowing others in their classes, but knowing other students is not just for fun, it is essential to adapting to and succeeding in college.

3.1 Freedom From ... Freedom To

As we have seen, students who come to John Abbott experience a new autonomy: the freedom to choose programs of study, courses, teachers, even whether to attend class.

The freedom students have within the college to make of their college lives what they will is a valued new educational experience.

What will be the best things for you about going to CEGEP?

Just I guess the freedom.... I think that will be the best. I know that it's still school and that I have to work. It's not like a joke or anything. I think I can do more at my own pace now and not necessarily slower but more at my own pace and more when I feel like it.

The big thing for me was the schedule. In high school everything was laid out. You pick your courses, well, not all, you pick like three. Then it's laid out and you have six courses and your lunch is here, recess is here and you leave here. That was the biggest change. That and, if you don't go to class, you don't go to class.

> *In high school, if you don't do your work, the teacher comes and nails you with it. But here, if you don't do the work, they usually don't know. They don't go around checking to see if you've done your homework. It's your responsibility.*

The initial reaction seems to be a "freedom from" outlook: a freedom from the restraints of high school where attending class and doing at least a minimum of work were required.

> *There's so much freedom. If you take advantage of it, it gets you into trouble.*
>
> **How did you take advantage of it?**
>
> *Well, I mean, because you don't have to go to class. You can miss class. So it's tempting to miss class. So I did that for a while. Then it got me in trouble. I didn't do it as a way to fail, but I would just take advantage of it.*
>
> **When you say it got you in trouble, what sort of trouble?**
>
> *Well, I'd miss class, I'd miss what I had to do, and I'd always have to find out what I missed, and it was hard.*

At orientation, students learn about building schedules. If they have been fortunate enough to obtain good advice and coaching, their first registration should be a satisfying experience.

> *I had a great time doing my schedule because, you know, the way it ended up looking, I had breaks all over the place and people who don't have breaks, I'm sorry for. You know, like they have nothing on Monday, nothing on Friday. Nothing on either day and you cram almost the whole time on Tuesday and Thursday, but I think the best idea is to have spaces in between, because my Wednesday, I don't start until 1:00 p.m.. I just sleep in the whole day. It's great! It's the opportunity to do all these things that you wouldn't have time to do normally during school. There's all these things I've always wanted to do, but you had to skip four classes in high school to be able to do them. Whereas here, you can do it "legitimately" at least so it's great fun.*

***

> *I looked at the schedule and whoa...! Look at all these courses, you know. You have a choice and in high school you don't have a choice. This is what you get and this is what you have to do! period! And your schedule is often made out for you. Here, you can have Friday off if you want, if you get it.*

Not all students get the schedule they have chosen. The failure to enrol in their chosen courses is used by some to justify other subsequent failures.

Students in career programmes (Nursing, Office Systems Management, Computer Programming, and Energy Technology) have schedules that are set by the departments. These students would also prefer the freedom of *"doing it my way"*.

> *Being in a program, your classes get pre-chosen. You're pre-registered for classes and you can't move them on your schedule. In Social, you can make up your schedule yourself. But with a program they pre-choose your classes, they put them in a certain place and you can't move them.... They choose it for you and I don't like that. They could just tell us you have to have these classes so put them on your schedule.... In a way, it's good for the college because then they don't have any screw-ups or anything.... But I don't like that because I like making my own schedule.*

There is a rich student folklore on ideal schedules and how to make the system deliver them.

Students are free to decide whether to attend classes. Classes compete with an attractive program of student activities offered in the college and with nearby student hangouts in the village.

> *The thing that really surprised me is that you have your classes and everything and they all expect you to do your work and be in class. The thing is, then they've got all that great stuff in the Agora and here and there, and the temptation and everything, and then you think, like, what do they want us to do exactly - go to the class or that? ...You get, like, two different ideas and you wonder what they really expect from you, what they really want you to do.*

***

> *If you have a class and all your friends are going down somewhere to Annies or whatever, you can go with them, or you can go to your Introduction to Poetry class or whatever. That's tough. You have to make decisions.*

***

> *I think the biggest thing in the first weeks is the big temptation. This is the first freedom you have in school, so you're tempted to go to Annies for the first time. It was different [from high school] in a way and the same in a way.*
>
> Did you fall into temptation and try it out?
>
> *Yeah, I guess I did. It was my decision.*

Students say skipping becomes a habit, sometimes a chronic disease: "skipatitis".

> **One thing other students have talked about is missing classes. Did this happen to you?**
>
> *Yes. I'd think, "I have to go to the class today because they haven't seen me." After a while, after I'd missed a few classes, I felt I couldn't go back. Then I'd keep skipping more and more.*
>
> **Why do you think people who start skipping classes skip more and more?**
>
> *I think the first class you skip you feel guilty about skipping, but your human nature is to try to push that away and try to cover it. I think that once you start doing it more and more, you don't feel as guilty any more and it starts to feel normal, and then you start to feel easy with that, and then it makes you feel good that you skip, and then you start skipping more and more and eventually I think you'll be desensitized to the guilt. Well, that's how I feel.*

However, students begin to recognize that they can exercise their freedom differently. They may choose to ignore the events that are on.

> *Now, I just walk past and if there's a rock band there, it's no big deal any more.*

They learn how much skipping is possible.

> *Like, now, I think, my second semester, I've started to skip a lot and that's because in my first semester I didn't skip that much. But, now, I feel I can catch up or I won't fail if I skip a course.*

They may also discover that the benefits of skipping are less than the costs.

> *I remember the first week I missed a class and I sat around for three hours. I was going crazy... I didn't miss very many classes because I found it wasn't that great. You just miss too much. In high school, I'd miss like two days of school, and you'd come back and be at the same place. But here if you miss two days, especially in a hard course like math or something, you'd have to catch up so much that you hurt yourself a lot more than anything. So that's when I realized.*

Teachers' actions also influence their decisions.

> **Is attendance taken?**
>
> *Yeah. Last semester, every single class, attendance was taken. This semester, I find that's different. I walked in the first two weeks and no one would take attendance. And so many people would miss class and the teacher didn't know. Now, just lately, they're starting to take attendance. So a lot of kids*

> *have already gone over their limit or are halfway there and the teacher doesn't know. Now they're taking attendance. Everyone's taking attendance now.*

And some students might find "therapeutic" interventions by the teacher to be helpful.

> **How would you have felt if your teacher had phoned you after you'd been missing from a few classes?**
>
> *I think it might have made it easier to go back.*

Students have to, in their words, *"mature"* in order to deal with the choices provided by the freedom. In other words, they begin to react with a "freedom to" mentality, characterized by choosing to take responsibility for their work.

> *From my point of view, I just find you have to take a more mature outlook on the college than you do of the high school, because just the workload and the courses and the seriousness of college is much different from high school. In high school, you can miss, like, three or four weeks and you can still catch up by the end of the year. Whereas, here, you miss three classes and you can practically fail your course; depending on the course. So, it's like you really have to mature a little and take it seriously.*

They see taking responsibility as realistic practice for the choices they will have to make in the outside world.

> *Nobody's going to stop you from skipping. In high school it was a big thing. Hey, are we going to skip? Make a fake note and all this stuff, and make sure you don't get caught and not seen. It was like an operation. In college, it's nothing. You miss class, it's okay. I find that good in a way, in more than one way. It's good that nobody's there to bug you. You have to get ready for outside. If you get a job, it's not going to be like that.*

3.2 Making Choices

Another reason new college students feel autonomous is that the majority are arriving at the age of legal adulthood. They make decisions about their lives after college.

> *I feel like I look more ahead to what's going to happen to me than in high school. In high school, you're in Grade Eleven, think about Grade Eleven, and don't think about what's going to happen after it. Now you're in CEGEP, you think, well, I'll be going to university. What university do I want to go to, what program should I go into, what do I want to do with my life, what kind of work do I want?*
>
> **You said "if" you stay in the program you're in?**

> *I was thinking about changing at some point. My ambition later on is to possibly go into Law and if you're in Pure and Applied it's kind of going in the wrong direction, so I'm thinking of changing to Social at some point, but I don't know when and if.*
>
> How do you make that decision?
>
> *I don't know. I guess I'll have to find out more about what you need and stuff to get into certain universities and that kind of thing.*

They try out programs and courses to see what they want to do, and to be.

> *In Social, you can take all different types of things and see what you like. If you go into a program, you're only doing that. If you choose a program, it's mostly because that's what you want to do. But if you go into Social, you can choose all different types of areas and you can see if maybe there's something better to do. That's one good thing about being in Social.*

***

> *I wanted to be a lawyer, but there's too much schooling in that.*
>
> When did you shift direction?
>
> *When I thought of coming to Commerce, actually.... I didn't want to go into Social. I thought also of going into nursing, but I'm not getting paid definitely to do a whole bunch of work. You don't get paid enough for doing a whole lot of work. So I decided against that, and I didn't want to go into Social, and I'm good at Math.*

***

> *At one point, about two-thirds into the semester, I realized I wasn't really where I wanted to be. I went to see a counsellor. All my life, I've always liked the business aspect of things, but they were telling me at the beginning of the year to take the Chemistry, etc., because I had good grades, and you don't know what you want to do. Don't close all the doors.... [But] in university, I want to try and get into a commerce program.*

This same student went on to make a comment that revealed one of the assumptions on which decisions about programme choice are often made.

> *He told me, "If that's what you want to do, do it. Don't let other people tell you what to do." He said something about, "Oh, you got that door speech as well."*

The assumption that the sciences open all doors for all students is, like all generalizations, inappropriate for some.

> *Well, a lot of teachers in high school.... If you're taking Physics or Chemistry, they'll push, "Take Pure and Applied, take Health Sciences." And maybe you're not necessarily good at it or you just don't like it, but you think, "That's what's expected of me. That's what the future is going to be needing; you're going to be a scientist." That's what they try to push at: try to be this. They try to tell you what to be. Well, when you get in here, you just don't like it anymore, so they change and they try to find something that they do like. Some of them might have thought that they wanted to be history teachers, or something like that.*

***

> *But their parents told them to go into Pure and Applied because they'll get a better job with all the sciences and all the maths and everything like that. When they get in, they just don't like it so they change and they usually end up happier than with what they have now.*

The students seek, and in many cases gain, acknowledgement from their parents of this increased autonomy.

> *I think it's important to make your own decisions. I don't know, I don't always agree with my parents and now it's the first time I can make my own choices. I guess it'll help me to make my choices, but now they know also that it's time to make my own choices.*

However, all the choosing and growing toward maturity can be wearing, sometimes they look longingly back at the freedom from responsibility that the high school offered!

> **So, it's all on your shoulders?**
>
> *Yeah. It's pressuring me. That's what kind of makes me decide sometimes to go do my homework or watch t.v. What are you going to do? Turn it on? Nah, do your homework. Your parents are expecting you to do something.*
>
> **Does it work?**
>
> *Sometimes I pressure myself.*
>
> **There are a lot of things that go on in your life at this time.**
>
> *Sometimes I just wish I was back in Grade Seven.*

***

> *There isn't much of a difference [between high school and college] it's just another step in the evolution of your education. You get to primary school from pre-school and you have mommy by the hand.... It's just more of your taking responsibility and figuring out that this is your life. You can skip and you can do nothing all you want or you can get moving. It takes everyone a different amount of time to realize that. Even now I'll say, Okay I know that but I'll still procrastinate. I'll still say tomorrow.... And, I'll still pay for it.*

***

Do you miss anything about high school?

Yeah. I miss the lack of responsibility.

College offers students, most of whom are just at the point of reaching legal majority, a milieu in which they can make choices about the present and future lives. The college is a milieu in which students can receive guidance and exercise independence, restraint, and freedom simultaneously, as they choose how to use the freedom the institution allows.

3.3 Students' Relationships with their Parents

One area affected by the students' transition from high school to college is that of relations with their parents.

High school students who are, for the most part, under 18 (age of legal majority in Québec), are usually subject to the supervision and control of a parent or guardian, tend to live at home, and usually find that their parents are involved to some extent in their schooling. Parents attend "parents' nights" and "meet the teachers" nights at high schools: they are called in to the school to discuss their children's progress or lack thereof; they are asked to take an active part in helping the school with the education of their children, by providing a supportive environment at home and by overseeing their children's homework.

When these students reach college, much of this changes. Although incoming college students are often not yet 18 (indeed some may only be 16!), they are aware of their induction into adulthood. First, although college level education is public in the sense that there is no tuition fee, students are not required to attend college, they attend college by choice. Secondly, once at college, they discover that, in the view of their teachers and the administrators of the college, they are responsible for their own work, behaviour, and choices. Thirdly, they may experience a loosening of the proverbial apron strings at home: their parents begin to stop pushing them to do their homework, inquire less into their daily round of activities, and leave them to make their own choices about studies and studying.

This transformation in the relations between students and their parents is based, in part, on changes in legal status, on new institutional practices, and on desires of both students and parents to acknowledge the coming-of-age of these young adults. The students we interviewed enjoyed, even revelled in, this change in status, although they admitted to the continuing presence of subtle and not-so-subtle parental pressure.

Students feel more independent:

> *But at school you don't have your mother next to you and you can do whatever you want to do really. You know you're studying what you want to study because you've chosen those courses and your mother wasn't there at registration either.*
>
> *I felt like you're on your own, really, and you do what you want to do with your own time, you study what you want to study and I found that I felt more responsible. It feels good that you have to think of what you really want to do, and it's your decision to do what you have to [to] deal with in CEGEP.*
>
> *If you're failing a course, it's your problem. You have to bring your marks up and, in high school, it was their problem and your problem, and they would get your parents more involved in your schooling. Like, right now, my mom isn't really involved in my schooling. I talk to her about it vaguely. In high school, she wanted to see my homework every night, know what I was doing, and the teachers would enforce that with signatures...I don't think I need that any more. If I'm not mature enough to handle my own schooling, I'll never be. My mom has confidence in me that I'll do my work. She leaves me alone. She doesn't nag at me. In high school, nag, every night. Do your work, this and that. Now she leaves me alone.*

Some parents remain involved but try to let go.

This sort of increased responsibility, what's that like?

> *It's good. At home, you know, mothers are mothers, and no matter what they'll tell you they want you to be responsible but they still will take up most of that responsibility. They kind of make your decisions, like, your parents make your decisions at home.*
>
> *My parents push me still; they don't leave me totally alone. If they see I'm not doing any work, they'll say, "What's this. You're not doing any work." They push me to an extent but not like it was in high school. They're trying to let go. They're trying to say, "You do whatever you want to do. If you don't want to go to school."... They're not going to be too happy about it, but it's my decision.*
>
> *My parents are more interested now in my courses because they're so different from high school. Like photography or drawing. Oh, what are you doing?*

> *I haven't heard of that before. How do you do this? How does your teacher relate with you in this work? And I can talk more freely about my school work to them since the course is so different. It's a lot nicer.*

Parental pressure can take a quite explicit form, sometimes with positive results, sometimes disastrous.

> *A lot of people that are here, their parents make them go to school. They don't care. They must come here to waste their time, pass one or two classes a semester.... That's a total waste of time to come here for three classes. A total waste. Why don't they just go out and work?*

> *I have a friend last year who was here and he went to private school and all his life his parents told him what to do and they were really strict with him. When he came here, he hung around Ste-Anne's or skipped class. You can't compare private school to here. Private school, from what he says, is really strict. Then he came here and he wasn't used to it. They didn't tell him what to do or anything, and he lived in Ste-Anne's or Annies. He failed. He passed four courses or three courses and dropped out.*

The extent of parental involvement is limited by how much they know about their children's lives at college.

> *I know people that skip days of school...like, they'll come to school at 8:30 and they'll come here and something will be happening and they'll leave and go to Ste-Anne's or something. And they'll come the next day, "Okay, I'll go to class today," but then they won't. And you can't do that in high school because you get absences and your parents always find out how many days you've missed. Here they don't.*

> *His parents are really nice. I know his parents, and his mother is one of those really nice ladies who gets into her son's life and tries to know what's going on in school, and he really hasn't told them yet. He'll probably tell them next week or in two weeks. I think it's really going to break her heart. I feel bad about his parents. I could never do that to my parents. I could never drop college and expect.*

> *My family was pretty helpful. There wasn't as much pressure on me this semester; not like last semester. Since they couldn't bug me as much because they didn't know what was going on.*

They may take their information from their comparisons with older children who have already been to the college and use this as a basis for judging their child's performance.

> *They [the parents] say, "Look at your brother: he's working hours every day and you're not doing anything." [I reply] "I'm in a different course. I'm not*

> *getting the workload he's getting." And they think it's just an excuse. And then I was going to say, he's sitting down, he's doing three or four hours a day of homework, and I'm sitting watching the hockey game or something, so, they are telling me, "You keep up that work and you're not going to make it anywhere, you know. You want to work like that, well that's fine with us, you're just not going to make it then."*

> *My sister, she's in business administration and she does hours and hours and hours of homework, and like, I don't get that much homework so my parents are always comparing us. And, like, last year, they go, "Look at your sister. You know, that's what you are going to be like next year. You're not going to be prepared for it, you are never doing any homework."*

> *[My older brother] went from high school to university right away, which put more pressure on me because my parents wanted me to be a brain just like him.*

However, parents of college-age students have not lost all their clout. College may be free, but there are still lots of expenses, and children who do not meet parental expectations may find themselves paying for their own education.

> *She says it's you and if you don't do good, then you're going to have to pay for your school or drop out and go to work. She leaves it up to me. She says she's going to handle me like I'm a mature young adult. She says, you do your work and if you don't give your effort, then you pay yourself.*

Some students, however, do take the opportunity to be responsible even as they continue to acknowledge their parents as their main source of support.

> *My Dad is really proud of me. Dad, I need this and I need that and I have to go and get this and I need such and such for this, and this much money for this. He says, "You really have this all planned out." My Dad's gone through my brother and my sister. He doesn't want to go through me so I'll do it myself...I just want him to go through life saying, "I was proud of her at one point in life."*

3.4 The College's Relationship with Students' Parents

One of the freedoms that college allows students is freedom from parental scrutiny of their academic lives. No longer are parents informed of their child's academic progress, or even whether the child is attending school (we heard numerous accounts of students who had stopped attending classes without the knowledge of their parents).

In college policy and practice, the student is no longer a child but an adult. One of the indicators of the student's new adult status is that their contract with the school no longer includes parents. College personnel, unlike those in high school, do not ally themselves with parents. First semester students find this a novel and empowering change in their relationship with their parents.

> *At orientation someone told us that, for our marks, like, we're the only person that could see them, not even our parents could see them. That was, like weird.... That was another, like, change.... Obviously, my parents are going to...if I say to them, "You can't see them," they'll be mad at me.... I'm going to joke around and say, "I'm not showing it to you." I'm just going to laugh.*

The coincidence of legal adulthood with the transition to college, and the college policy on confidentiality of grades, which excludes parents from that school-student communication, make it easy, and, perhaps, inevitable for parents to blame the college for any disequilibrium in their relationship with their children, and particularly for a child's failure at college. Parents only hear one side of the story, e.g. when a parent asks "Why are you still in bed?" the reply is more likely to be *"The teacher cancelled class,"* or, *"The teacher doesn't care if we miss,"* than a reply like, *"There's a test and I don't feel ready for it."*

We did not plan to include parents in our study of the transition, but when we encountered parents in their roles as school board members, teachers, or principals, they spoke most feelingly from their roles as parents. One of our serendipitous discoveries is that there are a lot of parents out there angry about what has happened to their children at college, not specifically John Abbott, but all colleges. This is an issue deserving immediate attention.

3.5 Students' Relationships With Their Teachers

The transition from high school to college provides students with the opportunity to meet a new group of teachers and to engage in a new style of relationship. In comparing their relationships with their teachers, they are quite clear, and almost unanimous, about their pleasure at being treated like equals. They enjoy the more relaxed atmosphere of the college classroom, but they speak wistfully about the closeness that developed in high school between teachers and students because they were together much more than they are in the college setting.

> *In high school, you see the same teacher almost every day. It's smaller, and you get to know the teacher. I've had the same teacher two semesters in a row for a computer class. And in high school, you have Math class twice or three times a week with the same teacher, and you have all your friends, and you know the teacher more. I found it may be easier to talk to a teacher in high school than I would in college.*

However, students' relationships with their teachers at the high school are touched by the disciplined and authoritative structures of the school.

How did teachers act with students in high school?

Teachers didn't.

What does that mean?

> *I'm the teacher and you're the student. I teach and you listen and when I give tests you do good on them.... Some of them were a little bit easier and they'd laugh and joke with you and they'd make the class fun. More of them were like, "I'm the teacher and you're the student."*

Once these students come to college, their relationships with their teachers change. There is a new framework.

> *Teachers in high school, to me, are very condescending in a way. I don't mean their teaching. High school teachers are supposed to be disciplinarians. CEGEP teachers are more, "Hi, how's it going?" They talk to you in the hallway and you can relate to them.*

They feel themselves to be on an equal footing with their teachers, they see themselves as having a new role in the classroom. Students like the sense of equality engendered by being permitted to call their teachers by their first names.

> *Because it's no cover-up. This is my name and this is the way I dress and I'm kind of relaxed - like the outfit. If you're able to call your teacher by the first name, that means that you can switch roles. In high school, "Sir".*

> *It says they're equal and that we could switch positions. Like, we could be the teacher and he could be the student.*

> *In high school, it was sort of, "I'm the teacher, you're the student," and here it is a one-to-one basis, "I'm a person, you're a person," sort of thing. We're equivalents.*

They like the chance to be free of the inhibitions imposed in the high school.

> *Surprises? Maybe the fact that it can be so open. With high school teachers, you would not dare say a single swear word of any kind, because if you did, the teacher would get upset. But here you have some teachers who do get upset, but there are a lot more who are sort of more open, right down to our level, and occasionally swear no to, at, somebody, but because they make a mistake. I'm not saying that it is a good factor, but at least it makes him more sort of personal in a way.*

They like the relaxed atmosphere in the classroom.

> *I don't know, even though you have incredible loads sometimes, you come to the school and, "Ahhhh...," you take a deep breath and, you know, you're not really feeling crowded in class or anything, even though you are still learning. Sort of a little more relaxing because of this person, this one-to-one basis with the teacher.*
>
> *They treat you like you're an adult. You call them by the first name. You're kind of on the same level. Kind of. I think most of my friends joke around with the teachers more than in high school. You're just supposed to sit there and listen and all that stuff. But they talk to them and stuff. It's fun. It's like they could be more friends than teacher and student kind of.*

However, there is also the sense of distance, of loss of personal identity, so prevalent in large institutions and in adult society.

> *Here, a lot of teachers just don't get that involved. They don't know you. They know you as a student. They know you're there and if you're not there, they won't ask, "Where were you?" A high school teacher would ask, "Why weren't you in class?"*
>
> **Did you feel they ever got to know you as a person?**
>
> *No, not as a person, not as a person. They got to know you by face and by name, and maybe by a bit of the work that you do. They might get to know you but they wouldn't know your personality.*

Given all this, would the students go to their college teachers for help? Some still look to their high school teachers, particularly in the first semester.

> **What would you do if you have a little bit of trouble?**
>
> *I'd probably go to see my teacher at school.*
>
> **In high school?**
>
> *He told me that he'd help me out a lot. I'd probably go and see him.*

Some find college teachers difficult to approach.

> *I found that the teachers I had, like when you had problems in class or something, they are so bullheaded, you know. "What are you asking me that for? Are you stupid?" I found that just a handful would take time out and say, "Come to my office and I'll go over the work with you."*
>
> *They don't not so much take the time to care about what you are going through, but they just teach like: like, if they have an hour, they teach all that hour and they don't go beyond that, ... like, getting to know a student, or*

> *sympathizing with a student for what he doesn't know.... They don't make sure you know it. So, if I ask a question and tell him, "Well, I don't understand," he'll repeat to me what he's said and that's it. He won't go back and: "Are you sure about that? Do you understand now?"*

Others relate to the teachers more easily.

> *Oh, absolutely, every single one of them. Even no matter who, which teacher I possibly thought was incredibly boring, or I didn't like that much, I knew I could have easily gone to any teacher and said, "Hey, man, I'm having real problems, can you explain it?" and they would have gladly done it, you know. It is good. It makes you feel so much more at ease.*

Students also begin to realize that sharing in a common field or discipline provides a new basis for the relationship between student and teacher in college.

> *You can talk to them about certain subjects because you're in that program. You're specializing with them.*

So, what do college students want from their teachers?

> *I want to enjoy a class, and I have to feel comfortable with the teacher. I have to feel, Okay, I can talk to this person one-to-one. I can sit down and have a conversation with him. I don't have to, "Yes, sir; yes, sir."*

3.6 Students' Relationships With Their Peers

Making friends is a major priority for students at John Abbott. Friends help students survive, succeed, and enjoy their time at college.

The size of John Abbott takes a while to get used to and, at first, makes it difficult for students to feel at home and make friends. As they start to make friends, they begin to relax.

> **How long did it take you to get used to it?**
>
> *I'd say until I started really making friends in my program which was around, let's say, after three weeks, two and a-half to three weeks. You start to loosen up, you know. I guess the school is kind of intimidating. At least to me it was. If you don't know somebody in your program.*

Old high school friends, whom students continue to see, are "friends", while the new friends they make are referred to as "acquaintances".

> *A lot of people come and have their own set of friends already, so you mostly stick around with your own friends.*

> *For the last two semesters, the only people I've been with are my high school buddies and my boyfriend. I've met people in my class. I'll be in class and I'll sit with them and we'll talk and we'll do some poems together, but I've never made any real new friends that, "I'll call you this weekend." It's basically just the same old crowd.*

> *I've met a lot of people in my classes ... and you pal around with them, but then sort of outside class, you know; "Well, I'll see you next class." You say "Goodbye," not "See you later," to call you tonight type of thing. It's a lot harder to get together with somebody.... It's kind of hard to get to know them really well.*

Friends provide a support system.

> *They pushed me a lot when I wasn't working. They'd say, "Listen, you have to do this whether you like it or not. Do it. Do it now." And I'd say, "I'll do it when I want to." [They'd say] "Do it now!" Like, they'd make me do my work. They helped support me.*

It is important to have at least one friend, perhaps from high school, in class.

> *I think in all my classes I have somebody I know, someone I can talk to, so that helps ... it makes the transition in each class a little bit easier if you know somebody and then you're not sitting in a corner by yourself.*

> *I could not be in a class where you're sitting there and you don't know anybody.... Even if I don't know anybody in class, I'll go in and I'll start myself, but it's better to go into the class and feel you're welcome already. It's better to go in and relax.*

Some register for courses with friends.

> *I was trying [to make my schedule] with a lot of friends; you know, we were trying to get schedules together.... One person, sort of planned it. We went through [registration] and it [the class] wasn't open, but then we went and begged the teacher so we got in the same class.*

Some use college as an opportunity to distance themselves from old high school friends; to get out of the cliques they experienced in high school.

> *I just didn't like the school [high school], I didn't like the people. I didn't like the fact that everyone was the same and I was different. It was very preppy and I'm not.... I wanted to go somewhere where there were lots of people and different kinds of people.*

> *I remember trying to find other people to be with. You know, like I wanted to get away from the friends I have at high school. Then I started to find other friends and I found it affected me with school, it was so important to try and find friends - other friends.*

Small work groups seem to help students make friends.

> **Are there some classes where it's easier to meet people in than others?**
>
> *Yeah, in small groups. Like I told you, in [one] class, there's some people and I find we get along very well. We have to constructively criticize each other's work and that involves a certain amount of friendship.*
>
> **What about lab groups? Did you get to know people that way?**
>
> *The people in my lab who were at my table, there were eight of us, and every time we'd go down the hall, we'd say, "Hi". It's very friendly. I find that the smaller group you are, the more you need to reach out for someone to be on your side. When you're in a big group, everyone is just by himself, but when you're in a small group, you need someone to be by your side.*
>
> **Does it make you feel more comfortable?**
>
> *In some cases. I find that for the lab, ... having someone to do the lab with, someone you can have fun with or whatever, it's more productive. Also in my Creative Writing class. In cases like Math or Accounting, I don't think you need anyone to be with.*

It is easier to make friends in programmes and courses that encourage close working relationships.

> *Well, in my Tech class, you are always with a select group, and it is only the second semester, and I already know these guys. You talk to these guys really easily enough and the difference between that and my Core class [English, Humanities, Gym] you don't mix enough. I mean, you have your class discussion, sure, but you don't get to know the people's names, because you don't do anything in groups. The closest I ever came to getting to know most of the students in humanities class was this first semester when the teacher went around and said everybody's name.... Otherwise, it's pretty impersonal. That's another thing you have to get used to. You won't necessarily have friends in every class. When I first went to my first three classes in the first semester, my first three Cores, I knew nobody. Nobody! I walked to my Tech course, I knew nobody, but that was different because after a while, everybody is saying, "Hey, this guy is gonna stay in this course. Alright, I think I'll talk to this guy." That was sort of more personal, while in English, Humanities, and Gym, where they're constantly changing, people are always changing. I mean, you may get to know a wide spread of people, but it doesn't get really*

> *personal. You don't get to be "friends", just sort of the people you see in the hall. You go, "How's it going, Joe?" and walk by and that's it. That's probably the longest conversation you ever get with anybody who's in a core class.*

Relationships with friends are on a new basis. Students sometimes go from being very popular figures in their high school, to being part of the crowd at college.

> *You go to class and you don't know anybody and, fine, you make a couple of friends, but you're not going to be the social person of the whole school.*

The college is a place to make and have friends. Students who drop out are regarded with sympathy. Their new lives in other places seem to leave them without the support that is found amongst friends at college.

> *I have a friend that dropped out ... She's working now. She works from morning and she works downtown and she lives in Baie d'Urfé. She gets home so late and she's got no friends. Everyone's at school. You lose them. When you're at school, you do stuff together. But now she works when we're out. It's hard for her because she feels like she has no one because she has dropped out. And she's telling us, "Don't drop out; work hard."*

3.7 Students' Strategies

Incoming students develop various strategies to deal with the novelties they encounter when they make the transition to college. Some of them, obtain coaching and advice from siblings before entering the college.

> **How did you feel your brothers and sisters made you ready for the classes?**
>
> *They just explained that if you want to pass, you have to go to class.*
>
> **So that helped, having them?**
>
> *Yeah, it helped a lot. And when I went into my first week or two they'd all help me with my work or my essays once in a while. They'd give me pointers on typing and everything like that so I knew what to expect.*

They seek help from their friends.

> **How did you find out what you had to do for the project?**
>
> *I asked students that I knew in the class or even students that I'd seen in the class; I asked them to give me the information.*
>
> **Have you ever had to go to a teacher for help for anything?**

> *No, not really. I like to learn myself a lot. So I never really had to ask. So I'd listen a lot. It's kind of hard to find a teacher when you need them in their office. So I just do it by myself and see how it turned out. It usually turned out for the best, so I was lucky.*

They take advantage of some of the services offered by the college.

> *I took a study skills course here.... It was okay. There were things that I practically knew. No one ever taught me how to study. Like, you know when you're reading a book, if something's important, obviously you underline it and you write summaries of paragraphs in the margin.... They taught us quite a few things like how to speed read, how to take notes effectively, and what to underline.*

***

> **What did you do about those difficulties?**
>
> *We had to do a practice set and I wasn't too sure on that.... What happened was that I went to one of the facilities here, the Accounting lab, and the lady helped me throughout my dilemma and it was resolved.*

Even with various help strategies, some students in their first semester have trouble. They skip, they fall by the wayside, they would prefer to have a job, they may not like their courses, they find them uninteresting, they fear they are going to fail.

> *One girl took a leave of absence because she couldn't handle it. Another of my friends dropped out for the semester. She went to work full-time but she's coming back because she likes school better. They just didn't try. They didn't put any effort into it. They'd skip their classes whenever they felt like it. You can't do that. Once in a while it's alright, but to miss a three-hour class is like missing a week of school compared to high school. I thought, I'm not going to skip so I'm trying.*

For those who stay in college, dropping courses becomes a strategy for survival when they do run into trouble. Initially, students plan to make them up later, in the following semester or in the summer.

> **You started off saying that you did drop two courses and I wondered how that came about?**

> ***Well, one was...I disliked the course. Well, it's gym. They were all bigger people; I had to [play] against a guy; I didn't like the teacher and I didn't like the course at all so I figured I'd make it up next semester or in a summer course. One of the other classes - I can't remember what class it was - I was just not interested. You have to try before you find out.***
>
> •••
>
> ***I dropped Physics and Math. I was so far behind in those [after being in hospital] that I figured I wouldn't catch up. So I tried to concentrate on the other ones.***
>
> **What does that mean in the long term for you?**
>
> ***If I stay in Pure and Applied then I'm either going to have to take courses in the summer or go to another semester. I'll probably end up going another semester.***
>
> **Was that something you thought would happen when you came to college?**
>
> ***No.***

Dropping courses, however, brings its own problems.

> **After you dropped the classes, how did things go?**
>
> ***Well, then I had the problem of having a lot of breaks and stuff and I would have a class at 2:30 and nothing before that. So, once in a while, I missed classes and stuff and that didn't help. That's something else I'm not used to going from high school, having big breaks like that. That was hard.***

One strategy is schedule management.

> ***This [second] semester I made it so I didn't have any breaks. I have an hour break the whole week so I got around that problem. I wouldn't be tempted to skip.***

A more radical strategy that students adopt is to extend their stay in college. Some even plan this before they enter college: they view this extension as a means of avoiding failure and of ensuring good grades.

> **How long do you think it will take you to get all your courses?**
>
> ***Well, I'm planning on taking a summer course or two. It will take me about five semesters.***
>
> **Did you have this in mind when you started off?**

Yeah. I pretty much expected it because I've heard of people who haven't gotten through CEGEP and they'll just drop out and won't try. But I said to myself, I'm not dropping out. I want to go to school and if it takes me more than the regular two years, then I'll take it because I'd rather pass all my courses in those four semesters than have failed a few on the way.

Do you think people come in with the idea they're going to be here three or four years? Do most people come and think it's going to be a two-year stay?

Well, for instance, I think it's two years and that's it. I want to get out of here in two years. I do not want to stay a veteran, I don't want to become a veteran of John Abbott. Some people, if they really experience difficulty in high school, they say, well, I'd rather take like four courses per semester and finish in three years to get a better mark. They'd rather do that than fail each semester. Or, if they have a job, if they really need a job or something, like, if they really need the money. I know a lot of people that are only taking four courses. They'll do the four courses well but they'll do it over a greater span of time.

In their second semester, they take much more care in making out their schedules. They plan strategically for registration, to get courses they want, the timing they want, the breaks they want - and they prepare to fight for what they need!

Last semester, your schedule?

Yuck! Whoever comes should expect a bad schedule. Because I was hoping, hey, great, 8:30 to 3:00, I don't mind. Everyone should expect a bad schedule because...it's weird, but everyone has a tendency to be at the end of registration, and so, what happened with me is, when I went to registration, I had all these schedules planned and when we got our print-out of what was available, I had to - all my schedules - I had to shoot them out in the garbage and make a new one in five minutes. I'd just put any courses in and I got them all.

What were the things you did differently this semester [to get a better schedule]?

Well, last semester I had, like, five different schedules. I went up for one and he said, no, but I didn't know that I was registered for all the courses that he'd suggest to you, so I'd go back in line and I'd give him another one and he'd say, Well, you're already registered in this and this and I didn't know that. This semester I was ready and I had backups for every course and it just went smoothly.

Do you have as many breaks this semester as you did last?

I had breaks but they're not as long and they're with friends so it's not too bad.

When you were putting together the schedule, was that a purposeful thing you did not to have as long breaks?

Yeah, because I knew what it was like to sit around for three hours and I wasn't about to do it again this semester.

I really demanded the courses that were closed from the deans or whatever, and that's sort of how I got them. I was more aggressive, and not so timid.

They learn to schedule their work.

Getting assignments in on time, is that a problem for you?

Yes, sometimes because everyone will leave it to the last minute or the teacher maybe; "Well, if you don't hand it in on time, it's okay." Then, it's alright. But if it's a teacher who takes off ten marks for it being late then you get it done when it has to be done or they'll do it the night before and they'll stay up all night and be tired the next morning. That's the only problem. If you start your project like a week ahead you'll get it in on time. Or even, if they're done the day before, they won't be done to the best of my ability, but I usually get good marks so I don't complain.

Another strategy is to choose their programmes, courses, and schedules in accordance with their own needs and interests.

Which program are you in?

Social Sciences. I should have been in Health.

Is that right?

Yeah. Everyone asks me, Why didn't you go into Pure and Applied? Why didn't you go into Health? Like, I have really high Math marks and all my other marks were pretty good and it's, "Why did you choose Social?" I experienced trouble in Chemistry and I've never taken Physics because I feared it. It was like, No, I'm not going to take it. I just knew that once I had taken Chemistry and it didn't go too well and I figured, no way, I'm not going to do this for my life and that's why I took Social.... I like Math and some people say, Well, why didn't you go into Commerce? But, then, the business aspect, I don't really like it. I prefer this. I'm in political science and sociology so I don't mind it.

***

What are the things you wished you'd known?

I guess how to make a schedule that fits your lifestyle. If you know that you like to get home early and you make a schedule to finish all your days at 5:30 then you're much more likely to skip. You should make it the way you like it. If you like to sleep in and you know you're always late in the morning then maybe you should make your classes later. But if you like being on time and you're always on time, you should make your classes early.

***

Were you looking forward to that free time?

Yeah. I was thinking that five years of high school is a long time going from 8:30 to 3:00 so you look forward to it. It's not quite the way you think it will be. Everybody in the first semester makes their schedule so they have three-hour breaks and stuff and, but the second semester everybody realizes that doesn't work. So they're all trying to cram their schedule in the same as high school, so your schedule kind of goes back to a schedule that looks like a high school schedule.

They decide which classes to miss and how often, based on an estimate of how many they can miss with impunity (the rules cited here only apply to a specific class).

They still skip here and there. Everyone does. Not skip. I mean not go to class. I guess it is skipping, but when I think of a skipper, it's mostly because they skip a lot. They'll miss a class. I mean you have six classes to miss, hour and a half classes, so it's not that bad.

So the rules are made clear to you, are they, about how many classes you can miss?

Yeah, if you have an hour-and-a-half two times a week, you can miss six classes before failing. If you have, like, three-hour classes, you can miss six hours. So that's two classes.

They decide when it's more valuable to miss a class than to attend it.

You said that was a course you felt you could miss?

His textbook was about 20 pages. So if you read it, you knew the whole thing for the whole year. All he did was talk and show movies. We had one big project, so I gave in the project and never went to class. In the middle of the semester, it was easier to miss class because we'd always find other work to do in another class.

They learn to motivate themselves.

> *One thing I think is important is to try and get into your work. That's one thing I couldn't do last semester, you know, get into it, get interested in it. This semester I am more than I was last year. If you're just there and reading a book, you don't really care. You have to try and get interested in it.*

> *I found that you have to smarten up. You shouldn't slack off. It's not the teachers pushing any more. It's yourself that's pushing you now. That's my opinion. I push myself.*

> *Last semester, I couldn't organize anything. I would get something and I'd procrastinate and then I would do the things. Now, every week I make myself a schedule of what I have to do and when I want to do it. When I plan to do it. After work, before work, during breaks. I like writing things out and planning what I'm going to do and then look it over.... I find that organizing yourself is so much better.*

Students devise strategies to enable themselves to succeed; however, how a student defines "success" may be surprisingly different from a teacher's understanding of the term. To students, success may entail leaving the college and getting a job. It may mean deciding to miss classes for other activities of work that the students deem more worthwhile. It may include dropping some courses in order to guarantee smooth, albeit slower progress through college. The idea that students consciously devise these strategies may shock some educators: but the fact that they do is a reality.

3.8 Information

Before getting there, students hear about college from many sources. Some seek advice from the guidance counsellor, but right away students evaluate the information they get from the counsellor:

> *She is not really there to tell what it's like, she's more to help you choose what you want to be and which college to choose. So that's what I mostly talked to her about. I didn't really ask her what it's like.*

It is apparent that the student thinks that the job of a counsellor is to dispense only factual career information. What students want most to know is, *"What it's like"*. The information from guidance counsellors is checked out with friends.

> *During the summer I worked with people that are already in CEGEP or have gone through CEGEP so they talked to me about what it would be like. Also the guidance counsellor at our high school explained to us what would be happening.... It was useful. We would have been really confused when we first came.*

> *[My friend] helped me see what was really going on, other than what they were telling me upstairs. It was just unbelievable. That guidance counsellor doesn't know what he's talking about.*

Students assess the information from the counsellors, compare it to that from friends, and often find the information from friends more believable. When in college, the student may look back and see this information in a different perspective.

> **Do you think Grade Eleven students would believe what a teacher or a guidance counsellor is saying?**
>
> *Maybe not at first. But once they get there and see what it's like: "Oh my God, I remember what Mr.*** told me."*

So the information received from guidance counsellors is only one element in the picture that the student is drawing.

Along with counsellors, high school teachers are a source of information on college; but it seems that, at times, students do not get the information they are seeking.

> *Like the teachers in high school were trying to prepare us for it [college] but I guess the preparation that they gave us.*

Two interesting postulations can be made from this statement: the use of the word "trying" carries with it the implication that the results were not successful, and the unfinished sentence suggests that the preparation was not sufficient.

Another student also talked about checking out information with sources other than his teachers.

> *Some of my teachers were always saying "Well, you better do homework because in college nobody is going to push you."*
>
> **Did you believe them when they said that?**
>
> *No, actually. I talked to people in college and they go: "Well, look the teacher pushes you sometimes. It depends if you have a good teacher or not.*

Still in search of *"What it's like"*, students continue to ask high school and college representatives for more information.

> *They told me basically that there's a lot of student activities going on at JAC. About work, they said it was basically just like high school but the programs were different. They couldn't give me information about the sciences. All the information I get from the sciences were JAC's pamphlets. It didn't really tell*

> *me what to expect.... It's not just like high school and they don't prepare you for it.*
>
> *[During Career Night] you could just go up to the booth and they sort of tell you and give you pamphlets and stuff. They don't really tell you exactly about courses but they'll give you a pamphlet. Other than that I don't remember that they did very much.*

The students obtained factual information from the pamphlets but, once more, this type of information was not really *"what to expect."* The use of *"they sort of tell you"* implies that the oral message sent by the representatives was not exactly what this student wanted to hear.

Occasionally, the information received is greeted with scepticism by the students.

> *One [college representative] actually told me that you can fix your schedule any way you want, which is not true. I knew that because I have an older friend who's been to college and I was like: "What's wrong with you? You obviously don't have your information right." So that kind of made me upset. They don't know what they're talking about. They come to these schools and they tell these students that it's great fun. They don't tell you about the work that's involved.*

Unwilling to accept at face value the information provided by the official representatives, students consult friends, whose information is considered more reliable than the representatives.

Considering the importance of friendship for adolescents, it is not surprising that prospective students turn to friends for information. Friends also can pass along only partial perceptions, as coloured by their own experiences. Students take the information from friends, consider what they know about their friends, and evaluate the information accordingly.

> *Well, the people I talked to during the summer, it depended on what program they were in. Some said if they were in Social: "You'll have a great time, it's like a party." The people in Commerce said, "You have to work, but it's fun," and people in Pure and Applied said, "You can have fun but it's really tough."*
>
> *Well, before I got here I had friends that were here and they told me. I had some friends that were flunking out and some friends that were doing really good. It was a two-way street. The smart ones were telling me that you have to work, you have to work really hard. The other ones were telling me: "No, you don't have to do any work, it's not too hard."*

Students find out also that the information they receive from their friends is incomplete or in opposition to what they themselves experience once they are in college, just as it was in the case of teachers, counsellors, and college representatives.

> *A lot of people told me a lot of things, a lot of different things. People were telling me that it's really hard. It's a big drastic change. When I got here I didn't find it to be. It was a big change but it wasn't what people were making it sound like.*

> *I didn't really get much advice about the whole thing. My sister talked about the work. Everybody that's been here, they don't really help out. They just sort of nudge you and: "You guys aren't doing anything. Wait until you get to CEGEP," and when you're there, "Wait until you get to university." I didn't know what to do. Parents don't really know much about it either. The high school teachers, they just sort of just tell you have to learn things on your own "over there".*

In addition to what they are told by counsellors, teachers, college representatives, and friends, students also have at their disposal written information supplied by the college. This method of disseminating information is only partially successful, as can be understood from the following excerpt.

> *They give you books but all they say is how good this college is. Oh this is a really good college. The classes are well lit and stuff like that. They say what it's like, but not from the point of view of the student, but from the point of view of someone that's trying to make students come to the college. So that's what they write in their pamphlets and books.*

Coming from a generation that has been exposed to all sorts of advertising, this student infers that pamphlets are a form of advertisement, and, as such, give only part of the information needed. What happens to this information?

> *The thing is, with books and pamphlets a lot of people don't even bother reading them. They just throw them in the trash. But when someone tells you, you remember. A pamphlet, you don't. People are so lazy and when you give them a pamphlet it's "So what?".*

Students resort to television programs and films to complete the elusive picture of what it's like in college.

> *The way I saw it on t.v. and stuff. It was like a lecture and nobody even knew the teacher...you know, when they're grading your paper, they only see a number and they don't even know you as a person.*

Interestingly enough, this student uses her critical judgement and appears to discard this media information she had received when she adds: *"I don't think it's like that."*

> I would picture it [college] though. Like you see on television when they show what college is like. So I could picture it, but I wasn't sure, there is no way until you go.

Repeatedly, students say:

> *At the college, they tell you about the courses they offer. They don't tell you what the school is like. They don't tell you what you can expect.*

In order to find out what they can expect, some students opt for summer workshops, organized by the college.

> *To go into the first semester, I sought a lot of help, and they were very nice and everything, but I never got the important information.*

The key word here is "important" because it reveals that, although the student received some information, it was not completely useful. The student adds: *"Now I do it by myself. I'll go to the career shop and look at things myself."* It is interesting to note that what could have been a disappointing experience has led further reliance on personal judgement.

Student comments about summer workshops also reveal the importance of timing, when scheduling activities.

> *As for the summer courses, they try to help but it's too generalized.... It was so early that people hadn't opened up their books and didn't know what to ask yet. Yes, it was too far away for anything to sink in and it was so general.*

While still in Grade Eleven, students wonder (worry) about one aspect of college life more than any other: Registration.

> *I hope I'll get an earlier registration date. I don't know how they do it. Someone told me it was by how well you do while you're here [in high school]. Someone else told me they just take the first year and second year by random and they fit you in.*

They report to registration, expecting the worst: *"I hear registration is all that bad and everything."* Often this expectation is confirmed during the process itself.

> *So you open the book and there are thousands of courses to choose from. You don't even know exactly.*
>
> *Registration is a big thing. Well, the rumour is that if you're in the last day you're not going to get any of the courses you want. What am I supposed to do?*

The uncertainty of the process, as well as the conflicting reports, unnerves students.

They have to select the appropriate courses for their programs of study, a complex task of meeting multiple college and program criteria. They also bring their own likes, dislikes, and goals (to have Fridays off, the hallmark of a college student). In addition, there is a large body of student wisdom to be taken into account in selection of teachers.

Confronted by *"thousands of courses to choose from"* after they have rarely chosen any in high school, students are naturally perplexed. They turn to other students for help.

> *You're sort of asking other people you know. Sometimes you get ideas from them. This is good and that's not good.*
>
> *[My boyfriend] told me everything, like what it was like in registration...he made it sound much worse than it was. So it was better. It helped me out, like, how it was. How people were.*

Here again, the interview reveals that students want to be told everything, not only the good side, of college life. Being prepared by her boyfriend for the worst, and being told *"how people were"* helped this student through registration.

> *I was a bit nervous before registration because of all these stories I heard. I told myself that this is the way it is, and there's nothing you can do about it. You might as well go in there and make the best of it.*
>
> *Well, I know people who've been here for a couple of years and they said "Well don't take him or take her."... They'll say, like, don't take this class...because it's really hard and you have to do a lot of work...or, they'll say...if they're good teachers.*
>
> *My friends caught on. They found stuff out faster. They'll say: "Watch out for this guy, he expects you to read the book."*
>
> *I asked all my friends. They went through my book and said, "Good, good, no, no." And I chose from what they said was good and bad.*

"[My friends told me] things about no lunches." This is a very useful piece of information for the new student because no one had previously revealed that there is no official lunch period, unlike in high school.

> *The idea of how to sneak into courses.... Getting to know a teacher.... Because his course is closed, going up to him and he may open it for you...[or] if you hang around until 5:30 or until they close registration, you can still pick it up. They'll open the courses for you because they want to get you out of there.*

This, indeed, is a useful strategy that students pass along to others, in order not to be registered in courses they did not want. What else do friends say about courses?

> *You find out from your friends one [course] is easier than the other and you try your hardest to go for that one.*

Why is this information so important?

> *Because if you mess up your first semester, it's really hard to get in [university]. You realize afterwards and you've really paid for the mistake. You may not think later, but the difference between four semesters in CEGEP and five is such a difference in universities...because there are so many applicants for universities when they want the top, and if you can't handle CEGEP I guess they feel you're not fit for university.*

It is interesting to note that, when in high school, students lived in anxiety, expecting the worst from college. Now in college the anxiety is still there but directed this time toward university life. Where do they get the impression that there is *"such a difference between four semesters in college and five?" "In fact, the counsellors stressed that."*

Students do not seek information only for the purpose of choosing easy courses. They want to know about the teacher or what the course is about. Many subject areas are mysterious: Humanities, and Sociology, for example, are new to students. There is also a collection of rumours about teachers to be checked out.

> *There are stories. I don't know if they're true or not. Crazy rumours and stuff. If you're curious, you take the teacher and if you don't want to, just stay away from the course.*

Why do students seek first the advice of their peers?

> *Because the student experienced it. Maybe the teacher experienced it a long time ago and times have changed now, so maybe it's different. So maybe a student would be better.*

So why don't students always accept their peers' advice at face value?

> *If someone says, "Don't do something," you're going to want to see why they said don't do it, you're going to want to check it out yourself.*
>
> *I talked to a couple of people about it and they all just said: "Oh, it's really boring. The teacher is not good." But I don't really think that's the reason. The main reason is that they can't take the work.*

Surrounded by information of all kinds, emanating from different sources, students always want to check out information.

There are two types of information that the student receives. One, conveyed through pamphlets and official documents, distributed by guidance offices, gives such "formal" information as entrance requirements, what constitutes a program, the registration procedures, and so on. Factual information, mostly about what is expected of students.

The second type of information is informal (hearsay, rumours, and "grapevine") and deals with all the practical, experiential aspects of college life: how to select the course that will be both interesting and easy, how to differentiate between a "good" and a "bad" teacher, how to deal with "breaks", and so on. This "informal" type of information, because of its subjective nature, is being constantly revised and verified. Teachers and counsellors, "professionals" at large, are not necessarily excluded as a source of "informal" information; but, in the students' opinion, these professionals have been distanced, either because of age or time, from the process of entering college and what it feels like. That is why, in the matter of *"how it is", "what the school is like", "how the people were"*, and *"how it feels and how you do it"*, students turn to their peers, closer to them in age therefore better attuned to their quest.

Both the formal and informal types of information, the two sides of the coin, are necessary to the students: each type is a sphere of a particular group of advisers. There is a complementarity in this process that can be beneficial for the student in transition.

3.9 Advice

Using the information gleaned from school officials, friends, and family students go through their first semester. For some, the transition is easier than for others. All students, having gone through this "baptism of fire", feel they are in a position to transmit advice to friends, teachers, and administrators.

To friends, they offer advice on various aspects of college life. Students believe that such advice should be passed on before potential newcomers get to the college.

> *Get all the Grade Elevens together and sit them down and say: "Okay, this is what college is like. Do you have any questions?" Because there's a lot of questions and some of the students don't feel like asking them. They're too shy or whatever. The brochures just don't seem to tell them what they want to know.*

In being aware that shyness prevents students from asking questions, this particular student demonstrates a perspicacity that sometimes eludes teachers. This excerpt also stresses the importance of creating an atmosphere that would encourage students to ask questions. This theme will be developed later on.

One part of college life that may not be emphasized sufficiently by teachers is the "fun" aspect of the institution. It may be the first time in their lives that some students, isolated in their own culture and traditions, meet others of different linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

> *I'd tell them [the high school students] it's a lot better than high school because there's so many people...so many different people and there's French and English people. It's pretty fun though.*

College is quite different from the "sheltered" life of high school.

> *I'd tell them [high school students] to expect it [college] to be hard, but not as hard as some people call it. Try to make it fun, try to meet other people, because all through your life you're going to meet other people and you can't just stick around with your buddies.*

> *[My brothers and sisters] just said to try and make as many friends as possible because they're more likely the ones you'll keep than from high school.*

Students entering college sometimes end up avoiding old friends.

> *Try not to...register with friends because you're going to end up with them and you're not going to end up talking with other people around you. You're not going to try and work with other people.*

However, it may take extra effort to meet new friends.

> *Discuss things with other people in your class. If it's a lecture, try and find out other people's opinions because when you're talking in class, it's easy to go up to somebody and say: "What do you think about it?" They'll always have an answer and you'll usually get to know a person that way.*

How else can one meet new friends and integrate in college life? Be involved. Relax.

> *You could tell them just about the activities that they can get involved in. Not everything but just tell them that often it's a good thing to get involved in a thing or two to get your mind off things.*

Between loosening old bonds and making new ones, there is often a period of loneliness, sometimes compounded by the feeling that one is alone in feeling this way.

> *[I'd tell them that] being alone isn't too bad because everyone has to do it...just not to be embarrassed about being alone. It's not as bad as everyone thinks.*

Coming to college means, for most students, a coming of age - not only the chronological age to vote or to order a beer, but also the age to plan, to make decisions on their own.

> *The important thing also is to think semesters ahead.... You just can't think of the same semester, the one you're going into...or else...eventually it will be your fourth semester and you want to take these courses and...you won't be*

> *allowed to.... You just can't go through CEGEP taking all these bobo courses, ones that are really easy, and expect to get into a university of your choice for what you want to do. You have to be aware of the prerequisites and things like that.*

Planning ahead certainly is a component in preparing a schedule.

> *Instead of making up thousands of schedules and tossing them out because that one doesn't work, you stick to one schedule and for every course you have three or four back-ups which you have written down on a piece of paper.*

There is another element, purely subjective in nature, that enters into the process of making a schedule. This important element, says one student, is *"Know thyself"*. Knowing oneself means understanding one's goals before making a schedule. If students are more interested in the social activities of college life, they plan their schedules to allow time to participate in these activities. Students recommend means of avoiding some problems, particularly skipping:

> *I would tell them to make their schedule in such a way that you don't have many breaks so you won't be tempted to skip.*

> *I'd tell them to not have any breaks because it's easier...to go right to your next class so you don't get bored and sit around.*

Registration is considered a difficult hurdle but, once it has been overcome, students fall into a sort of euphoria of freedom: freedom from attending classes, and from forced homework, and freedom to participate in social activities. Students who have experienced this give the following warning to their classmates.

> *Yeah, we can do whatever we want. It might be fun at first but by the time you get to the end of the semester and you've failed five courses, it won't be that much fun. Then you end up staying an extra semester.*

Students are wise to the reality that their classmates will ignore their advice, just as they ignored the advice they received. Still, they offer practical solutions to student problems.

> *Stay with it [the course]. You paid for the course. If you drop it, you're just going to be here longer. Who cares [if the teacher is bad or boring]? I've had classes I hated and I stayed in them. Stick them out.*

Another student, aware that stressing the educational benefits of a diploma would be of little value to other students, goes to the heart of the matter.

> *If you come here and screw around and drop out you have to go get a job at $4.50 an hour or something. I guess I would tell them to just go to school and go to class. It's not much effort. It doesn't take much of your time.*

> *You have so much vacation. You have the whole summer off. Just think of that. Set your mind on that and work. It's not asking too much. Put them in the shoes of their parents who have to work and get two weeks vacation off a year.*

Students tell others how it is and what to do to survive in college: particular tricks for getting into courses after they have been closed; not to buy second-hand books until the course outlines have been checked, just in case a newer edition is required. They also have advice for both teachers and administrators on how to promote an easier and smoother integration for students in the college system. The following statement, although addressed to high school teachers, could be directed also to parents or guidance counsellors who try to shape their adolescents' decisions.

> *Try to get the teachers to let the students make the choice of what they want to do. Don't try to push something on them that they might not like or probably won't like or something like that. It will probably be easier for the student because, for something he likes, he'll work harder at it instead of some who don't have any feel for the course.*

Advice directed at high school teachers can be general, but here is an observation that is specific and easy to put into practice.

> *Maybe try and do some of the things teachers do here [at CEGEP]. Leave you on your own a little more. Like when you have to read a book, don't read it over in class, just give it to the student.... Do it gradually from the beginning to the end.... Make them do it all by themselves and give them a chance.*

This student, whose high school teacher had used this approach, emphasized how helpful it had been.

> *In terms of preparing I guess the ideal thing would be to prepare for CEGEP would be to make the classes more formal.*

Having said this, the student realizes:

> *That would take the fun out of high school.. You have to decide whether you want preparation or whether you want to enjoy high school the way you like it.*

As for college, the student continues:

> *They could make it more like high school in the sense that there be less big assignments and more little assignments. But that isn't really preparing you for university. You have to stick to something to prepare for university, or else you're just falling into the same trap that the high school is doing. They're not preparing you for CEGEP.*

> *If you have like an assembly type thing where you have all the new students coming in and you have one spokesperson on the stage, still that's good. It's better than a pamphlet but it won't get through. The best ways would be like a one-on-one basis or maybe three students and one person. Not a crowd; because in crowds people won't listen. They talk to someone or something.*

The originality of this statement lies in two areas: first, the importance of timing when providing information. We have already seen that information passed during assemblies or Career Nights in high school, or during summer workshops, may not have the impact the organizers expected because it was untimely for the students. By having this "assembly" at the very beginning of the college term, chances are that more students are ready to receive the message. Secondly, information passed on in a noisy gathering may be missed. A more personalized type of approach, as advocated here, could make for more effective communication.

Students tell other students that it is up to them to adapt to college.

> *It's not all that terrible adapting to it. It's just motivation. Once you're here you have to be motivated to get through.*

It is nothing magical, explains one student:

> *I find if you go to class, take notes, do your work, listen, you're going to pass everything. You don't have to wrack your brain studying to pass everything.*

This may be true but, in spite of good intentions, newcomers still experience difficulties in their classes.

> *In CEGEP they offer the same English class. I was thinking it's kind of unfair in a way because they don't put people who are in Grade Ten in Grade Eleven English class and yet they accept it as normal once you reach CEGEP you're at the same level in first year CEGEP as someone in the fourth year. I think it's a bit unrealistic. I don't think you can be expected to have the same skills as someone who is older.*

This perception, equally shared by some teachers, has already led some institutions to identify some courses as being more appropriate for first-year students.

Students also have advice on how teachers can be instrumental in assisting newly-admitted students. First, to help students become motivated: *"Make the atmosphere in classes a little more relaxed and not be so abrupt,"* suggests a student.

> *If a high school student is all of a sudden faced with a CEGEP teacher who will treat him like an adult - and rightly so.... There are numerous ways you can go. Just say forget it and play cards in the cafeteria. You can get discouraged and drop the class.*

Another student recommends:

> *Making groups and getting people to know each other so it's more comfortable in the classroom, and people want to go to the classroom.*
>
> *Some teachers expect you to know what you're supposed to be doing and how things work and stuff like that...it's one semester for each class and they just expect you to know. The first year is with the second year and everything is all jumbled up and it doesn't give you much time to catch your breath. Maybe if they introduced things a little more gently.*

This does not imply that the pace throughout the course should be slower, but that the introductory phase of the course should allow a little breathing room.

Advice ranging from how to make registration easier, to how to keep the student along the road to self-motivation is preferred by students. This advice, extended to students, faculty and administrators alike, could assist an institution to become more compatible with the intellectual and psychological development of new college students.

CHAPTER 4 - TEACHERS AS CHANGERS

We have described the principal themes in the student interviews and our observations of high school and college classes. Our goals for this action research project also included effecting changes in our classrooms and our institutions. In this section, each member of the research team describes change we have experienced and promoted. Our recommendations advocate others as well. Common themes here are listening to students more, assuming we know less, a focus on the process of learning (the "how" or learning to learn), and the difficulties we have encountered in deciding what to change and how to change it.

4.1 Teachers as Change Agents, Louise Cornell

Can teachers be agents for change in their classrooms and their institutions? I certainly hope so. It is simultaneously difficult and easy: as a teacher in the college, I am both free agent and bound servant. Within the bounds of my professional understanding, I am free in my classroom to do what I deem best for, and with, my students. Within the parameters of the college bureaucracy, there is much that I cannot accomplish on my own; many decisions are taken without my voice being heard, even though they affect my life and work at the college. How then am I an agent for change?

Nobody has ever said that collaborative action research is easy. I have not seen any literature about the demands placed on the individual collaborators. In contrast to a team of individuals that is formed primarily for expediency's sake, there are interpersonal matters, professional concerns, and inter-institutional constraints that must be taken into account. I have learned a lot about working with colleagues from other disciplines, other colleges, and other educational institutions. My style of work and writing have needed to change. I have had to learn to get my work done early, to allow for input from colleagues. I have had to submit work I do to my peers for approval. I have had to attend lengthy meetings where my colleagues and I struggled to find consensus on contentious issues. Although these steps seem restricting, I have learned to appreciate some of the outcomes of collaboration: the freedom from self-imposed pressures and the learning that results from sharing work and ideas.

There were several reasons why I joined the research project that first became known as "P3", and later as *"Easing the Transition"*. First, the project was of interest to me because of my background in comparative education and studies in educational administration and policy. I became excited at the prospect of being part of a study that would have the potential to effect pedagogical change in our educational institutions. Secondly, having served for several years on the Inter-Institutional Committee and the Research Training Institute, I wished to see how collaborative action research as a methodology translated into practice. Thirdly, I wanted to see the research team represent enough disciplines to give the project a broad base. I specifically wanted to have the contribution of someone from a department where, for the most part, all students in the college are taught in classes together. Fourthly, as a lecturer in the department of Humanities, Philosophy, and Religion, I wanted to see how I could improve my work within the context of my department and within my classroom.

Participation in such events as the First Year Experience conference in Toronto and the Learned Societies Conference (Canadian Educational Researcher's Association) in Québec City yielded thought-provoking professional exchanges.

After having had a half-time leave to work on the project this Fall (1989) and now seeing this time reach an end, I realize I shall feel bereft of the sense of professional vitality.

As a teacher, I know that I and my colleagues seek to teach our students effectively. To do this, I must understand my students and their world. Like most of us, I think I do possess this understanding. However, as one of the team observed, we get older each year while our students remain year after year in approximately the same age range. Furthermore, I did not attend college; my formative perceptions of the transition to post-secondary education inevitably stem from that experience. The data of the project have made me realize that times have changed! I have become aware that, beneath the roof of our college, exist two very different worlds: the teacher's and the student's. The students' perceptions differ in some ways, although not in all, from my memories of my own life at a similar age.

What changes must be accomplished? I should attempt to bring about change in the classroom and in the college at large, as well as to encourage my colleagues to explore the ways and means of change for themselves. Along with the desire for change, I must have techniques, mechanisms, and knowledge which actually enable me to change.

It has been disturbing at times to become aware of students' perceptions of things I thought were valuable; encouraging although provocative to see them assuming adult roles; broadening to see the world through their eyes. In the classroom, I have become acutely aware of the need to listen afresh to my students. In fact, in company with the other members of the research team, I have found that every conversation with students (as well as with other teachers) has become something that I should listen to. I have learned new techniques of responding to statements that my students make, methods that help me to draw them out.

I have been further exposed to mediation skills that are invaluable in the class discussions and group-work techniques I usually try to use. I have become very much aware that students have their own agendas in terms of their choice of classes and teachers, their presence and participation in class, their academic responsibilities, their friendships, and their social lives.

How does this affect me in the classroom? How can I help to effect change within my college? The answer is, "With difficulty!" I am still too close to the data to be able to generalize about my reaction to it all. I have found myself already acting on some of the immediate findings and considering whether and how to respond to others.

I have made even more of an effort to learn my student's names and to return their assignments with sufficient, helpful comments on them in good time. With some success, I have sought a greater degree of participation from my students in the organization and orientation of the courses I taught this past semester. I have allowed my students to accept the consequences of the decisions they make. In three cases, students have had to make their own decisions about course withdrawal and possible course failure.

As far as my life in the wider institution is concerned, I have been forced to reconsider my assumptions about college life. Are my three-hour classes beneficial to students? Do activities in the Agora add an unnecessary pressure and sense of conflict for my students and for me as a teacher? Should I encourage my students to take several courses with the same teacher or to take every opportunity for the learning that comes about through changing teachers? Should I set strict deadlines for work due? Should my department have special courses designated for entry-level students? Should I require that my students attend classes? Should I support the suggestion that students should have scheduled lunch breaks? Are my office hours sufficient? There are no easy answers to these questions.

I would like to see a much greater emphasis on professional development and the development of pedagogical expertise in our college. "It's never been done that way before," should not be the barrier to necessary changes that we have recommended. The data from the project offer a rich resource to help us to be agents of change. There are difficulties, personal, individual, and institutional. I have only tentatively, and with some trepidation, begun to consider possible solutions.

4.2 How have I Changed?, Rod Cornell

My involvement in this project has given me a number of new understandings of how students progress from the children I first see in Secondary I to the young men and women scholars who come out of college.

As a teacher, I have always been aware of the changes involved in maturing from a twelve-year-old Secondary I student into a Secondary V student. My approach to teaching has taken this change into consideration, and my style varies between a teacher-directed, authoritarian approach at the lower level, to a more student-directed, democratic approach at the senior level.

Because of my involvement in this project, I have had the opportunity to get to know a number of college teachers, and to glean from them a different understanding of what they were expecting from their students and what they were trying to teach them. I have become acutely aware that while many high school teachers are concerned with teaching as much information as possible (and this is provoked, in many instances, by the requirement that our students pass their high school leaving exams), these college teachers, seemingly, put the emphasis much more on the process skills involved in learning.

The implication here is that true education is training. It is not sufficient to teach facts: we must teach the young people in our classes how to find the facts, and to evaluate them critically, so that they may not only increase their knowledge, but also their wisdom.

As a result, I have attempted to change the orientation of my courses so that I give the student the opportunity to participate in learning, and to be autonomous in decision-making. I told my students, at the beginning of this year, that there were a series of homework assignments which were important for them to prepare, not so much for me, but for them, in order to be prepared to pass their class tests.

What I have gotten from this research project is a deeper understanding of what students actually think about schooling. A healthy dose of realism is very necessary to help us rethink our approaches to teaching. In order to compete successfully in the market place, much is made of "getting close to your customer". It is just as important for the teacher to "get close to the student". That is what this project has done for me, but this is only the beginning of a process of change.

4.3 How I have changed, Leslie Dickie

When a student makes a statement in an interview that you do not agree with you cannot say, "that's not true". If it is the expressed belief of the student, it is true for that student, and possibly true for all of student culture. The teacher may not like what is expressed, but he or she cannot deny it.

Listening to the students in the interviews has taught me to listen to what the students are saying in the classroom, in my office, and in the halls; in fact, whenever I am conversing with students. From these conversations, I have gained insight, not only in the domain of this research, but also, into the conceptual knowledge of the students.

For example, I have learned that many third semester Physics students are unsure about the behaviour of light. When they are looking at an object, is light coming from the object to their eye or is light going from their eye to the object? Being aware of the two possibilities and realizing that they, themselves, should think about the possibilities and the consequences of the two possibilities helped me help students understand the behaviour of light. Most Physics teachers would assume that students understand that light goes from an object to the eye.

Teachers often take fundamental concepts such as these for granted. Students may never have had to confront the issue, to think about it, to resolve the dilemma. Unless one hears what the student is saying and not what one wants to hear, or worse, if one just talks at the student without giving the student the opportunity to put their own ideas into words, one cannot be aware of what they are thinking.

Is the role of the teacher to talk or to listen? The traditional roles have the teacher talking at the student; the student as passive absorber of the words and ideas.

In this project, I have found that students are less likely to skip classes that are fun; that classes are fun if they involve participation.

Cognitive research has suggested that even though it is difficult for students to give up their own conceptions or misconceptions, one of the most successful strategies is to have the students confront their logical dissonances and express and explain these in their own words; to involve the students in active learning. Only if one gives students opportunities to talk, to participate, to argue their points of view with their peers, can one listen to them.

These two research findings (students prefer classes in which they participate; and the pedagogical effectiveness of having students resolve cognitive dissonance by discussing them with peers) both point to a constructivist view of learning in which students construct their learning by adding new knowledge to the knowledge they already have and connecting new ideas to existing ones. New data and ideas cannot just fill an empty mind.

An important time to listen rather than talk was when students came to my office for help. When asked how to do a problem, a teacher can simply explain how to proceed or can listen while students struggle through their own ideas on how to approach a problem. I adopted this second mode: listening first. I treated each student visit as an interview, only speaking when I thought guidance was essential. The students constructed their own methods of solving the problems: constructed their own learning. This approach takes much longer than simply telling students the answers; however, students gain confidence in their own ability to do problems.

Students are striving for a sense of identity. In the first semester of the project, I was surprised to find that students who had worked together most of the semester in a laboratory group did not know one another's names or telephone numbers. To counter this isolation, I assigned students to groups of four (rather than allowing them to choose a single partner). Each group of students included a range of abilities as indicated by grades in a previous course. The laboratory reports for each experiment were written by the group as a whole (one report for the entire group) and each member of the group received the same mark. The responsibility for preparation of the report rotated through the members of the group, and each member of the group signed the report as an indication that the content met with their approval.

One noticeable effect was that an entire group would come to my office, *"We have been working on this in the library and don't understand..."*. Some groups were setting up their own meetings and jointly doing the laboratory report. Other groups allowed the "responsible" to do all the work; this had the effect of, in one student's words, *"Putting a lot of pressure on me to do a good job because the others are relying on me."*

The strategy of making the group responsible made the students work together, made them work with people they might not otherwise have chosen to. It was very encouraging to see the groups in the lab talking about the work rather than just doing the experiment and leaving.

At the end of the semester, I asked students to do "free writing" about their thoughts on this new way of writing up laboratory reports compared with the traditional one student, one report format. All were positive with regard to getting to know others in the laboratory and in the class, but were more guarded concerning what they were learning. When the group wrote up the laboratory experiment jointly, they felt they learned the material. When one student was assigned the task, the others felt they *"slacked off"*, and that this became worse as the semester progressed and the workload increased. A number still felt they needed the discipline of the individual reports to make them learn the material. Many thought individual reports were time consuming and mostly copied from past reports or from friends.

My subjective judgement is that the experiment was a success, and that keeping order threatened to become a bigger problem than encouraging discussion. Perhaps the solution is to require formal joint reports with the responsibilities for the different part of the report (theory, data, analysis, conclusion) rotating through the group, and to allow time in the lecture sections for discussion by design.

4.4 The Challenge Is Change, Henriette Elizov

My own field of expertise has been, for several years, the teaching of French language and literature. By now, the subject matter holds little mystery to me. However, since participating in the *Easing the Transition* project, I have become aware of some subtle changes in my teaching style.

Learn to be aware of problems.

It became apparent, through our interviews, that one of the students' greatest fears was to be isolated, even in class - to be lost in the shuffle. I have always prided myself on learning my students' names quickly, if not the last name, at least the first one. I have gone one step further. In my *dynamique de groupe* I am making sure that everyone knows everyone's name in the class. Whenever a student refers to another one in the class as "he" or "she" in the course of the discussion, I promptly make him or her repeat the other student's name. After a few classes, I noticed that a kind of bond had formed between students who, at the beginning of the term, were total strangers to one another. As a teacher, I began reaping benefits from this, as students became more relaxed and participated more in class discussions.

Our students' responses also revealed that, although students don't want to be lost in the shuffle, they also don't want to be singled out.

> ***Another thing that's very important for me is that in my classes I have so much trouble concentrating if I'm sitting all alone.... I have to know that there are people...around me...that I know who they are and that we know each other so that I'm not a single person.***

Keeping this information in mind, I arranged students oral presentations in panel form, so that no single individual would be the focus point of the class. This also worked well as students felt more comfortable, literally "rubbing shoulders" with their classmates.

One perception that many college students share is that teachers "don't care". My first reaction was that the students were not right, that this was not a "fact". But who is to say what is a fact? Clearly, it was the students' perception of teachers and, in the case of the students, perception is reality. Trying to rectify this in words seemed useless because, in the past, I had told my students when and where I was available in my office. It was not until the end of the term that some of them came looking for my office. My colleagues also noticed the same phenomenon. This term I gave each of my students a five-minute appointment in my office during the first two weeks of class. I noticed afterward that some of them came willingly to see me to discuss problems of academic or personal nature. As one student said in his interview about college life, *"The teachers were good lecturers but not good participants or good sympathizers."* As a result, I began to see my role more and more as a facilitator in the learning process rather than a dispenser of information.

Learn to ask questions.

In preparation for this project, we participated in a seminar about interviewing techniques. Throughout my years of teaching, I have been aware of the importance of body language when dealing with students, but this seminar underlined the importance of the process of asking questions. I knew better than to ask questions that could be answered with a "yes" or "no", but I had to learn to ask questions that did not lead to an impasse - questions that lead naturally to further exchange on a subject. Quite often, as teachers, when we ask questions, we already have an answer in mind. This colours the way we ask the question. Aware of this, we prepared a guide for the interview that would provide us with a framework that is, at the same time, flexible and directing. Through this exercise, I learned to ask questions that probe the student's mind, just like a sonar system probes the bottom of the seas. From what I would get back, I would draw a picture of their opinions making sure in the process that we did not wander too far afield.

This technique also enabled me to further class discussion during a lull, either by repeating what had just been said with an inflection of my voice or by paraphrasing. Again, in the matter of paraphrasing, I learned to be careful with my choice of words so that I would mirror the student's perception and not mine.

Learn to listen.

Just as I had to learn to ask questions, I had to learn to listen to the answers. This meant listening attentively to students' ways of phrasing sentences, to their usage of vocabulary so that I could paraphrase them. As a language teacher, I had already been trained in this technique; this time I encouraged my students to use the technique: to paraphrase not only the text in questions, but also each other. In this way, the students were forced to listen to what others had to say. They too were learning to listen.

A few ripples of change.

These few techniques that I have acquired, or polished are beginning to have ripple effects. During our pedagogical workshops at Dawson College, I shared with my colleagues the information I have just presented. We decided to adopt, in the Fall, a common policy of having the students meet us in our respective offices at the beginning of the term to deal right away with the perception that teachers *"don't care"*.

I also shared with my colleagues a piece of information which was made evident through our interviews: students do not read material available to them, be it college brochures, information booklets and such. Therefore, we are organizing, in conjunction with the Learning Centre of Dawson, a session during which all French teachers having a common teaching block will meet, along with their students for a period. During that time, the students will be trained in reading and understanding the course outlines which, for some reasons, are ignored or forgotten. As a counterpart to this, we are making an effort to make our course outlines as clear as possible, using if possible, the students' own terminology.

While discussing the matter of reading the course outlines with my colleagues of the research team, one of our team members commented on the readability of college materials; in particular, brochures describing requirements, registration procedures, and so on. This member of the team read a particular college brochure on the matter. She found it unclear and confusing. Therefore, she was not surprised that newcomers to colleges rely so heavily on their friends' help for information and guidance. She suggests, and we agree with her, that administrators address the question of readability as soon as possible.

It is interesting to note that the idea of *Easing the Transition* has already germinated in various sectors of colleges. For example, during a recent meeting of the Arts Sector of Dawson College, teachers from the English and Humanities departments have agreed to identify in the Calendar, where course descriptions appear, those courses that are strongly recommended for first-year students. This resulted from an awareness that incoming students may not be as prepared for some English and Humanities courses as the second-year students, and may consequently have more difficulties in achieving good results in their courses. Other departments in that sector have agreed to follow suit. This is a first step in easing the transition for these students.

More and more, people at the colleges are becoming concerned about the failure rate of first-year students. In a parallel way, the problem of *échecs et abandons* has become a top priority for the Ministry of Education in Québec. As a result, the colleges are looking into the feasibility of adopting, and adapting if need be, the "University 101" approach that is becoming widespread in the U.S. This course is offered there as a package. Its goal is two-fold: to encourage good study and research skills among students, and to expose those students to the variety and methods of intellectual inquiry. To do this, a variety of teaching-learning techniques are employed, including lectures, small group discussions, individual research, fieldwork, and frequent written assignments. The implementation of this type of course would require a greater degree of cooperation between the academic and administrative staff; schedules and timetables must be meshed.

The willingness to explore this possibility already exists. At a recent symposium held in Sherbrooke, many teachers, academic advisors, and administrators, representing most of the colleges in Québec, emphasized the fact that *l'aide à l'apprentissage* (learning skills, note taking, time management, and so on) should not only be dispensed to "high-risk" students (those most at risk of failure), but to the whole student body. Various learning centres in colleges have already strained their resources and, therefore, could not be expected to take over this arduous task. The "University 101" course, should it be implemented, would be one answer.

Jerome A. Jewler, Co-Director for Instruction and Faculty Development at the University of South Carolina, wrote in his *Inventory for Success in the Freshman Seminar*:

> When you consider that our challenge in higher education is to help young people develop holistically, to prepare them for their future, and to get them started on the right track, you realize the critical nature of the very first semester of college in the shaping of future generations.

Our research team has been aware for a long time of the critical nature of the first semester. It is from this very concern that the *Easing the Transition* project was germinated.

Emerson wrote in his *Journal* that: "The things taught in schools and colleges are not an education; but the means of education." By easing the transition for students, we hope to fulfill partially the mission with which Emerson entrusts us.

4.5 Change in the Classroom, Jan Farrell

The content of the interviews with college students has caused me to incorporate some different approaches into the teaching I do at the Secondary V level.

In considering a change in approach, one has to recognize which things cannot be changed and which things should not be changed, in addition to those things which can and should be changed. When a college teacher complained to me that her students had no skills in making marginal notes in their textbooks, I countered with the reality that, in the high school, we do not encourage our students to make any marks, let alone notations in the text books: these are lent to, and not owned by, students. Some of the practices carried on in the high school are dictated by circumstance.

As a teacher of Secondary V students, I normally start right into the course content after spending some time telling the students of my expectations of them for the year. However, this year I began by using a few periods to deal with the fact that this was the students' last year in high school and discussing what expectations they supposed teachers would have of them in college. Thus the "rules" of the school and the classroom, which define appropriate behaviour, attendance, homework, and deadlines, were discussed in terms of how they related to the classroom for this year and college next year. This was done in small groups with one member reporting to the class on the topic of their discussion. Because they are facing college next year, the students themselves saw a need to prepare for the "responsibilities" they expected to have. The classroom "rules" evolved as a negotiated set of behavioural guidelines, of which the students felt they had some ownership. Interestingly, these students set some very strict guidelines! For example, the students initially saw no reason for ever extending assingment deadlines.

It has been effective to share relevant quotations from the student interviews with my own students. They seem particularly interested to hear the experiences of their peers related in student language. I plan to share more of these with them, closer to graduation.

I am making a conscious effort not to use the admonition that their college teachers "won't care" about homework not done - instead, I emphasize that these teachers will expect that they will know that doing the homework is a way of learning. One statement made by a student had a particular impact on me.

> ***You have to learn at some time that you're not doing things for your teachers anymore, you're doing them for yourself.***

I have tried to remind students that each homework segment is designed to make learning an easier task by affording the opportunity for practice and assessing weaknesses. I have discussed theories on learning and memory retention with them.

I have tried to work within the negotiated guidelines on a policy for assignment deadlines, and to remind students that they must find ways of organizing their work habits to meet these deadlines. Each student is provided with an agenda book and is encouraged to use it. Students expressed a need to learn about time-management, so I arranged to have a consultant come in to spend a class period on this topic. I have tried to follow-up on this by reminding them of the strategies presented to them.

It is very hard to let loose the reins from these students, and equally hard for their parents to see teachers' control being relinquished. Sometimes even the students express a fear to that loosening. However, making it gradual and remembering the reasons for it seems to make it easier for all of us.

In other ways, the same practices persist. It is so hard to let a student fail! It is hard because of my own ingrained desire to have all students succeed, as well as because I know that parents expect teachers to do all they can to prevent a student from failing. For those reasons, I still seem to be there working very hard to change the first term failures into successes, knowing full well that next year this student is going to face a much different experience.

4.6 How I have Changed, Anne-Marie Kubanek

When I started working on this research project, around three years ago, I had been teaching at colleges for almost 15 years, after starting my professional career as an industrial research chemist. I felt I was an experienced college teacher who knew most the "tricks of the trade". The high school milieu, as well, was very familiar to me, I believed. I had been an active member and Secretary of the School Committee of the local high school, which my two children had attended. I assumed that in my life as a college teacher there were few surprises left for me to experience. I came to learn differently.

This last semester, I have been teaching half-time while spending the rest of my time as a researcher on this project. I have therefore been involved with half the number of students that I normally see during a semester. However, in this group of approximately 40 students, there have been an inordinate number of extraordinary events, personal struggles and tragedies - and joyful happenings. The emergency on hand had to be dealt with, before the students could settle down and attend to their studies.

What is different with the group of students this semester? I have to conclude that the difference does not lie with the students. Their stories might vary slightly from one semester to the next, but the real change, I believe, is within me, especially in the way I am learning to listen to the students.

I have interviewed quite a number of students while working on this project, as well as read many interview transcripts. For me as a college teacher, it has been something of a revelation to listen to the students talk about how they see and experience college life. This college, my familiar working place, now seen through the students' eyes, is suddenly a strangely different place. Their reality is so far from mine that we might as well be living in two different worlds.

Through many visits to the high school, I have found that my perception of that milieu was also a limited one - that of a parent. The classroom reality was unknown to me.

I have learned to ask my students open-ended questions; to probe and discover the reality of their world. It is the beginning of a journey towards a relationship with my students where I am more aware of where they are coming from and how they are seeing their experience at college.

As I have changed my ways of listening and interacting with the students, something else has changed as well; that is my office at the college. It has become a very busy place. This has put me in a dilemma: I have come to realize that I cannot continue managing my teaching in my old way, while responding to the students in my new way. There just is not enough time. What is the solution? Smaller class sizes would help, but I have little control over that. I believe I will have to reorder my priorities, and I am convinced that at the top of the list of my activities at work would have to come "individual contact with students". Combined with the use of peer-learning in small groups, I might be more free to spend time doing what I have come to believe is most important in teaching, namely: "listen to my students". "Good teaching is a stance, I think, a stance of receptivity, of attunement, of listening" (Daloz, 1986, p. 244).

4.7 Lessons from the First Semester, Margaret Waller

I am the least experienced teacher on the research team. I taught university undergraduate courses when I was a graduate teaching assistant and for one year after graduate school, but chose to continue my career in social science research rather than teaching. After ten years, in 1985, I took up college teaching.

Because of my research background, I brought an applied mentality to my discipline: Sociology is something one does, not only something one knows. Still, I began doing as I had been done to in university: lecturing, multiple-choice testing, and assigning end-of-term papers. At the end of my first semester, I felt worn out. The exhausted members of the *Easing the Transition* team, whom I have been coordinating for the past two years, will testify that I'm no slacker when it comes to work. And I will tell you that teaching is the most physically and mentally tiring work I have ever done.

One of the tiring tasks was keeping the students' attention by moving about the classroom, changing pace, incorporating their names and personal experiences into the examples I used. Inevitably too, there were instances where students disrupted this performance - talking among themselves, coming in late, leaving early. I was shocked by these things. I didn't remember students doing them in university.

As a sociologist, I realized that if you want certain behaviours from people, you teach it by providing (1) a clear description, (2) a practical model, and (3) rewards. So I began teaching and rewarding the classroom behaviours I needed from students in order to do my job well: punctuality, listening, asking questions. Things I had assumed teachers could assume.

In this project, I have learned once again: Don't assume anything. Visiting the high school, I observed that teachers' and students' behaviours are so different from college classes that only the most general aspects of teacher and student roles are transferable. There is quite simply no obvious and logical progression between the two institutions. High school students (and in some ways teachers too) have much less freedom: freedom of movement, freedom of choice, even freedom to think. In the student network (the grapevine), the greater freedom colleges allow in these areas are often understood as the absence of any norms. Both high school and college students told us that college teachers don't care if students arrive late, sleep or play cards in class, leave early, skip class, fail to hand in assignments, even fail. This is what most students hear most often from their most credited informants: their peers. We cannot assume that first semester students know how we expect them to behave in college. We cannot assume high school teachers can or should teach them college ways of doing things.

I have taught in three colleges; nevertheless, I don't know any college teachers who do not care about the above-mentioned behaviours, or who are not bothered by them. In fact, during an early stage of this project, a group of college teachers discussing the various problems with first semester students identified disruptive classroom behaviours as their number one common concern. Though we rarely talk about it together, we all spend a lot of time teaching the "how" of college, in addition to the "what".

Returning to my own first semester college experience: at the end of that first semester, I was sure I had learned a lot more from my lecturing than any of the students. I wondered about that.

Listening to students consistently describe teachers' lectures as boring, babbling, and blabbing has taught me that these students don't arrive at college with the skills to learn from a one-hour lecture. (Never mind three hours; I lack the stamina for that anyway.) Satisfying as it is to prepare these masterpieces of reasoned thought, they are wasted on people with 10-minute (maximum) attention spans. I now break lectures into 10 to 15-minute segments divided by 5 to 20 minutes for students to write, think, or discuss. Quite simply, class time has become less work for me and more work for them. I find students are learning more, not less, as I lecture less.

Analysis of our interviews with students has revealed surprisingly frequent accounts of teachers who can't explain things clearly. I'm surprised that so many of my colleagues could be described as inadequate communicators; they usually make sense to me. Our data also clearly indicate that students prefer to and do go first to their peers when they have questions. I decided to work with these student perceptions and preferences, and encourage students to teach each other. I create opportunities for students to explain things to each other ("peer teaching" some call it). This too has changed the work I do in class: more organizing and animating student talk, less talking for me. My reward: for the first time, I have had students who used correctly some of the professional vocabulary I value (jargon to you cynics). Yes, students have actually said "symbolic interaction" rather than *"that thing you were saying before, miss."*

CONCLUDING REMARKS

This is not the end of *Easing The Transition.* We have only had time to complete the broadest analysis of our data. There are many aspects we can explore more fully, particularly students' perspectives on failure at college. In the interviews, students sounded less concerned about this than we expected. We hope a more detailed analysis will allow us to comprehend why this is so.

There remains much practical work to be done toward achieving the changes in ourselves and our institutions that we have become convinced are necessary. The most clearly visible way for high school and college teachers to act on the recommendation of the Conseil des collèges à *améliorer de façon sensible l'articulation entre les deux ordres d'enseignement* is to make changes in the ways we teach students to manage their freedom and take responsibility for their own learning. Most are now learning by the sink-or-swim method. Students say, *"You have to experience it to know what it's like."* In this they are correct, but they could be experiencing freedom and responsibility in incremental doses in which there is less risk of overdose.

The challenge for high school teachers is to discover pedagogical strategies that will allow "responsibility to pour out of" students. High school teachers are aware that students need to learn this, but the most commonly reported way of motivating students is to emphasize the responsibility aspect and to scare them with threats of college failure. This is counter-productive. The age of high school students, and other institutional constraints, do limit the amount of freedom teachers can allow them to experience; however, many students have described teaching practices that have helped them. In the long run, such techniques are less tiring and more rewarding than the "pushing" and "pulling" that goes on now.

The challenge for college teachers is to teach students how to take responsibility in more "user-friendly" ways. The "psychological trickery" of college teachers who say, "I don't care if you pass or fail," though based on the sound intention to make students take responsibility for their own learning, discourages many students. Becoming "John Abbott High School" by imposing interventionist measures like closer supervision or monitoring is not an answer. Students want their freedom and, in spite of their lack of practical experience, are psychologically ready for it. Our challenge is to provide structured learning experiences; practical experiences that are less discouraging to students (and to us) than the failures that result from "putting your hand in the fire".

Thus it seems high school and college teachers face a common challenge: teaching students to be responsible for their own learning. We can work together on this. The more we work together, the easier will be the transition for our students.

Students arriving from high school do not have an accurate understanding of college ways of learning. They do have some beliefs that make them reluctant to approach college teachers and other sources of help. They believe college teachers don't care about them. They believe college teachers are too busy to answer their questions or give them individual attention. They often stigmatize helping services like the Learning Centre as something for "dummies" with learning handicaps. They believe everyone fails at College. The college's reputation as a social place is stronger than its reputation as a place of serious academic activity. Students are surprised to discover that college is serious. These may be institutionally specific characteristics.

We have discovered many specific instances of general principles previously articulated by others. For example, we have relearned that any information must be given at the right time and repeated often. Students can't assimilate much information about college while they are in high school, they are concerned with the here-and-now, and *"will think about college when I get there."* They can't take in much during the first days at college either; they are stressed and particularly concerned with learning the geography. During the first weeks they are most concerned with establishing their identity as a College student. Moving from high school to college, one of the first differences that they experience is being alone. They previously moved in cliques or packs. This "aloneness" and the initial difficulty in finding their way around leads some students to choose the safety of at least one friend in the snack bar over the risk of entering a classroom as a *"nobody who knows nobody".* Teachers who meet students' needs to be somebody, who give early validation to a successful-student identity, create in students a receptivity to the other learning (which teachers value most)--course content.

Discomforted by the feeling that college is totally different from high school, students have difficulty perceiving the similarities and continuities that do exist. However, there is a major discontinuity in the kind of thinking skills that college and high school teachers require. High school teachers cannot teach the thinking skills, which are specific to college: not all students are developmentally ready in high school. College teachers can, and should, teach students how to do the work of their specific disciplines as well as teaching the content of those disciplines.

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APPENDIX A - MONTHLY RESEARCH REPORTS

A.1 "The Name Thing is Something"

Report Number 1, August, 1989

Our new students are feeling like "nobodies". Last June they were the senior students in their schools. Everyone knew them. Today their world has changed. In an interview with an *Easing the Transition* researcher, one student put it this way:

> ***So I was really introduced to a new world where I knew nobody and nobody knew of me.... I was used to a lifestyle of walking into a place and knowing 80% of the people and talking to 80%. Coming to John Abbott it was, "Where is everybody?" I felt a bit out of place. I guess a lot of people would in a school of 5,000 students.... I'd find myself thinking, I want to go, I want to leave. I just wanted to go to classes; I felt lonesome. I felt really out of place.***

The new student's priorities now are making new friends and establishing a new college student identity. One of the college identities that students may adopt is "the skipper". Students distinguish *the skipper* as one who chronically skips classes. (All students are expected to skip a few.) A characteristic of *skippers* is a high interest in socializing with other students. Teachers can help students avoid becoming skippers by offering better alternatives. One student suggestion:

> ***The first one or two classes, just taking 15 minutes to just talk with other students, maybe give a project where they have to socialize with other students in the class to get more at ease about the situation...*** [See Action Strategy #4, below].

Students require a sense of who they are and a feeling of comfort in their new environment before they can begin to learn course content effectively. Being known by and knowing other students in the class contributes to their feeling of comfort.

The *Easing the Transition Research* Team have been surprised to discover how frequently in interviews students have raised the issue of teachers knowing their names. However, social and psychological theorists would have predicted that upon entering a new environment and a new role, identity becomes fragile. Teachers could reinforce that fragile identity by using students' names.

As class sizes have grown, you may have given up, as a frill, the effort to learn students' names early in the term. If so, you have given up a significant influence on individual students and a powerful control of classroom dynamics. The name connection is the first social bond of mutual obligation and reciprocity. The anonymous individual student can easily decide not to come to class because it is an individual decision rather than a social decision that affects the teacher and other students: "He doesn't know who I am, he won't know or care if I'm not there." Anonymous groups of students can more easily sit in the back row talking and give minimal performances of the student role in class. Students who feel they are known as individuals, students who experience a connection between their individual identities and their behaviour in class are more likely to behave like "good" students. Learning and using students' names can make your job easier.

Teachers who learn and use students' names send a reassuring message to students:

> **How do you tell a teacher who cares from a teacher who doesn't care?**
>
> ***Someone that is constantly reminding people of their office hours and who says, "Come to me if you need help".... Maybe a teacher that knows your name cares; in fact that's kind of neat. I'm trying to think of all of my teachers in CEGEP. Yeah, the name thing is something.***

"The name thing is something" that you can do to make the transition from high school to college easier for your first semester learners.

Action Strategies

1. Use a name game for the first day of class.

2. Have everyone (even you) prepare a name sign or tag for display at every class. Or have pairs of students interview each other and prepare name signs with "logos" based on something they learned in the interview. Writing and reciting are good ways to remember things.

3. Establish naming as a norm for the whole class. You don't have to learn all those names on your own. Henriette Elizov, Dawson College Teacher and ETT Researcher: "I am making sure that everyone knows everyone's name in the class. Whenever one student refers to another in class as 'he' or 'she' during class discussion, I ask the student to repeat the other student's name. After a few classes, I noticed that a bond had formed between students who, at the beginning of the term, were strangers to one another. As a teacher, I began reaping benefits from this as students became more relaxed and participated more in class discussions."

4. Assign small groups short, goal directed projects in class which simultaneously "cover material" and allow students to work together. A first in-class project might be to read and discuss the course outline in small groups. Ask each group to prepare two or more questions about the course and choose a representative to ask the questions when the full class reconvenes.

5. Tell your students you want to learn their names and ask them to help you do this: "If I pass you in the hall and don't recognize you, stop me and remind me who you are." The alternative is:

> *It's very hard to go down the hallway and say "Hi!" to a teacher and most of the time you end up embarrassing him or yourself because he doesn't remember your name or doesn't remember who you are, because they teach so many students and have so many classes and there are so many students in the school that I don't blame them for sure. I miss that. The first semester I found myself doing that and then I realized that I should stop because it doesn't look good when you say "Hi!" to a teacher and he just says "Hi!", but it looks as if he doesn't know who you are.*

A.2 Are They Ready for Us?

Report Number 2, September, 1989

The fall semester has arrived and with it around two thousand new students who just three months ago, celebrated their graduation from high school. We see them wandering the corridors, looking for their next classroom, and we wonder how they will adjust to their new environment. We teachers talk about the new students with our colleagues: it seems each year students have more problems coping with college demands. We know where the problem lies: with the incoming students. We discuss their deficiencies: they are unprepared academically, unfocused, undisciplined, unmotivated; they have poor reading and writing skills, poor note-taking skills, poor time management skills, poor problem solving skills - an endless list of "uns" and "poors". We are quick to look for solutions that will FIX THE STUDENT TO FIT THE COLLEGE MILIEU. This approach not only imposes our solutions on their problems (while we tell them that they are now adults and should take charge of their lives); but it also burdens us with a constant stream of students (a new lot every year) who need to be "fixed".

We could take a new approach to these problems by viewing the transition from the students' point of view. What do *they* think needs to be fixed? The *Easing the Transition* team has listened to students describing their first weeks and months at John Abbott. We hear stories of excitement, happy surprises, disappointments, fear, confusion, and intense loneliness.

> *It was scary, I guess, in a way because you're in a different environment; but I loved it and I felt like such an individual. I felt like you're on your own, really, and you can do what you want to do with your own time, you study what you want to study, and I found that I felt more responsible. It feels good that you have to think of what you really want to do, and it's your decision to do what you have to deal with in CEGEP.*
>
> *I guess the school is kind of intimidating. At least to me it was, if you don't know somebody in your program.*
>
> *It's a lot more impersonal and that's hard to get used to. You're used to being almost friendly with the teachers (at high school) knowing them all.*
>
> *It was really hectic. Everything was going so fast. It was like: Oh, my God, I have a class now, and I have a break, and I'd better eat, etc. And it was really, really fast. It was too fast. It was like going in a circle.*
>
> *It really didn't click to me it was one straight hallway. I felt I was going in a maze.*

As we enlist the help of students in looking for ways to ease the transition from high school to college, it becomes clear that this should not necessarily be done by making college more like high school, a world that most students feel they have outgrown.

> *I feel like I can do my own thing and it's my responsibility.... In high school, they really get on your back.*
>
> *You are not doing things for your teacher any more, you are doing them for yourself.*

How can we help the students succeed in this new environment? How can we use their excitement and enthusiasm to get involved in new ways of learning? Most of them loved the first month of college. How can we help them retain that feeling?

Action Strategies

1. We can find out which students in our classes entered college this semester (all those student numbers beginning with 89). Recognizing that they may be novices at being responsible for their own learning, we can offer friendly support and reminders of the differences between high school and college.

2. We can make use of group activities, early in the semester, in order to end the isolation that some students feel and help all students make new contacts. Peer learning can relieve some of the pressure of large class sizes.

3. We can make contact with someone from our local high schools, perhaps a teacher in our discipline, in order to familiarize ourselves with the high school milieu, so that we know more about where the students are coming from. Academic Alliances and QueST are two organizations that bring together teachers from elementary school through university. The Academic Alliance of Teachers of English meets again October 4th, call Penny Ross, loc. 479, for details. Science teachers can join QueST, Québec Science Teachers, 118 Crestview, Pointe-Claire, H9R 4A1, call George Ladd, Program Coordinator, 697-2480.

4. We can give the students our undivided attention, when they seek us out for help.

"Good teaching is a stance, I think, a stance of receptivity, of attunement, of listening." (L.A. Daloz, Effective Teaching and Mentoring, Jossey-Bass, 1986, p. 244)

By listening to our students, we can become aware of their agendas and of their definitions of success, which may be very different from ours, but which will nevertheless affect our chances of achieving our own goals. We can support them in building a positive college identity by showing our care and concern for them. In order to help these new students come out of the "maze", we can try to humanize the college milieu.

Maybe the question we should be asking is:

ARE WE READY FOR THEM?

A.3 Responsibility: An Air of Maturity

Report Number 3, November, 1989

For most students, graduating from high school and entering college is a form of intellectual and emotional rebirth. At last, they can leave behind the structured, supervised world of high school and experience what they have been craving: freedom. Or so they say.

What does freedom mean for them? It is freedom to choose a program of studies; to attend or skip classes; to choose one's schedule and teachers; to select one's place of entertainment or study; to be rid of parental scrutiny in one's work and life in general. As one graduating student phrased it: *"To learn to deal with teachers and peers on an intellectual and social level."* But a student entering college is also opening Pandora's box. Along with freedom, comes responsibility for one's acts. Very few students are ready, at the beginning of their college studies, to deal with this responsibility. Just like the three little pigs, they all sing "Who's afraid of the big bad wolf?" but privately a few of them dare to admit that indeed they are afraid of responsibility. Explains one student: *"You're kind of forced to be (responsible) in a way because of what's expected of you. Even if you actually aren't, you have to be. You have to kind of play the role of being mature or else you're going to fail."* There is, on the part of students, a certain ambivalence toward freedom and responsibility. After explaining at length how he *"just couldn't wait to get out of high school,"* a first-year college student reflected: *"I miss the (high school) teachers chasing after me. I like it but don't like it."* This same ambivalence is expressed by another student: *"There is always someone looking over your shoulder in high school and making sure that you're doing what you're supposed to.... When you get to college...you have to start looking after yourself and start making sure you get good grades. It is basically being responsible for your own activities."* This freedom is good, says the student, because: *"I don't feel as much pressure. It's good, but in another way it would be better...if I wasn't doing the work, they could start pushing me a bit, maybe give me a good kick in the pants now and then."*

We must not lose sight of the fact that most students are already responsible in domains other than the academic. Indeed, many have held a full- or part-time job for a few years; some may be living on their own, in charge of a family. They now have to be helped in becoming independent and responsible learners and, just like the climbers confronting their mountain, they have to be provided with the tools to face this new endeavour.

For example, there is the matter of attendance. Students may know that *"if you don't want to come in, don't come in"* but also *"if you miss two classes you're expelled from the class."* They are also aware that the onus of attendance is on them. (In high school) *"it was kind of like a game to see how much you could get away with. But here if you try and play that game, you're going to get nailed and you can't do that."* At the same time, they are also aware of implicit messages passed along, perhaps unintentionally, by faculty members. Says one student: *"It's really easy to skip courses for me and not to have to go to class. I'll make up the work some other time."* Adds another student: *"My (name* *deleted) class was what I missed the most (Ed: to miss = to skip) because...(the teacher) gives you so much freedom, you don't have to come to class, it's like an insult not take it in a way."*

Predictably, the result of skipping too many classes is failure in the course but sometimes students attribute their failure to the total freedom they are experiencing. Said one student: *"I stopped going to all my classes.... So I just kind of blew my semester...I'm used to teachers yelling at you and telling you that if you miss one more class, I'm calling your parents. They didn't do that there (at college)."*

Although responsibility is *"a skill not taught but developed, picked up by the student, not thrust upon him by a professor,"*[1] there may be ways for faculty members to help students develop that skill. Indeed, certain teachers have already taken steps toward this, as described by one student: *"First semester, most of my teachers said: 'You have two freebies and then the next two (absences) after that you lose five marks each and the fifth one you lose 10 and the sixth you fail.' So, unless there was a test and then you had to redo the test minus 5% because you missed it...it worked out well. I had two and three freebies in most of my classes."* It seems that this particular student was happy when, along with the freedom to choose to attend class, he was given guidelines on how to utilize this freedom.

Many teachers give guidelines of this nature; however, some students may need teachers to go beyond guidelines, for example, to find out why a student is not attending class. The student who was asked: "How would you have felt if your teachers had phoned you after you'd been missing a few classes?" answered candidly: *"I think it might have made it easier to go back."* While respecting the students' privacy, a teacher could contact those who are chronically absent to find causes and offer ways to return to class. As one student said, *"We have to learn responsibility sometime and now is as good a time as any."* Here are a few suggestions on how teachers can encourage this learning.

Action Strategies

1. The "freebie" system:
   Students could miss two classes without losing marks, unless a test is given during one of those classes. From then on, each successive absence will cost progressively more marks. Beyond a certain number of absences, the student fails the course. Thus, the student will have the opportunity to make decisions while testing the consequence of those decisions.

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[1] Danny Goldberg, Valediction, John Abbott College class of 1988.

2. Exchanging phone numbers:
Encourage students to exchange phone numbers with classmates to that they can take responsibility for catching up on notes and assignments missed during absences.

3. Group assignments:
Assigning work to be done by two or three students encourages collaboration and fosters a sense of responsibility to other students. Teachers could make sure that all students are doing their share of the work in group assignments by requesting outlines and/or drafts from each student, even when all the members of the group are to receive the same grade for their collaborative effort. Thus, teachers can make peer pressure work to the advantage of all concerned.

4. Deadlines for assignments:
Deadlines should be firm, for teachers as well as students. Flexibility should be reserved for special circumstances. In addition, tell the students in advance the consequences of late submission for assignments: loss of mark, work refused, etc.

5. Standards of quality:
Adhere to standards of quality for assignments. Some students already know that, *"You can't just hand anything and they'll accept if kind of things. You can get away with that in high school, you can't in CEGEP."* Encourage students to assume responsibility for the form of their work as well as for the content.

The class of 1989 Valedictorian said that college helped him achieve *"an air of maturity"*. With help from all of us, the majority of our students can achieve that.

A.4 Whose Work is this Anyway?

Report Number 4, January, 1990

In a recent research report we discussed the readiness of new college students to be responsible learners. The student's perspective on the differences between high school and college work can contribute to our understanding of why many students have not yet learned to be responsible for their studies at the time that they enter college.

Students talk very differently about the work they do at high school and the work they do at college. High school students talk about their work as work they do *for the teacher.* One of the reasons they think this way is because getting the student to do the work is ultimately the teacher's responsibility. The teacher is held accountable for student progress. Teachers report their (students') marks to department heads, principals, and ultimately parents. If the marks are low, *the teacher* is called upon for an explanation. Consequently, high school teachers work very hard to get students to do the work and make them pass. As one teacher put it, "If you don't haunt the kids, the parents haunt you."

This accountability structure in the high schools creates and opportunity for students to exercise power over their teachers by *not* doing work. Students can control teachers passively. Not doing student work makes more teacher work: "nagging" work in which teachers send notes home to parents, and cajole, preach and prod at school.

> *I remember in high school that the guys who were failing were always getting, "Stay after class, I want to talk to you." Every single day there were big speeches, and my friends would come out: "He just gave me a big lecture, a two-and-a-half-hour lecture." You don't get any lectures here (at college) from teachers. You better shape up or you're going to end up with zero, zilch, nothing. That's the difference here. Not having lectures about what you're doing with your life.*

Not doing work may lead to detention, but it also leads to more attention from the teacher. Conversely, when students do their work, teachers have more power over them: the power to evaluate. For students who think they may not do well anyway, the rewards in this game are in *not* doing work.

At college, responsibility for student work shifts suddenly and absolutely to the student. College teachers do not account to parents and are not constrained to pass students. Students who have successfully played tug-o-war with teachers over their work, may be in for a pratfall at college when the teachers let go.

> *For me it didn't come right away. For some people it might come naturally. After the first semester you really realize that you really do have to do what the teacher wants on time. It's not hurting the teacher.... The teachers don't give you trouble if you don't have an assignment but you get zero anyway. In high school you'd be in trouble but then you'll hand it in the next day and*

> *you still get the same mark. I'd tell (high school students) ... don't try to fool the teachers or outsmart the teachers because it won't work.*

The college work game has a new set of rules, which teachers communicate to the student as: "It is your choice to pass or fail. I don't care if you fail. you can't hurt me by failing."

> *In high school they sort of looked after you more. Like, if you're supposed to hand in an essay, they always go and ask if you have this and that; but here, if you don't hand it in, it's your problem and they don't care.*

> *Even though (college) teachers do care, they say--it's a sort of psychological trickery, if you want - they sort of say: "I don't care. You do your homework, you pass the test; you don't do your homework, you fail. I don't care." As a matter of fact they do, but they try not to show it in class. Sort of, I don't know, get you to take on the responsibility.*

The connection between studying (doing homework) and learning (marks) is not evident to high school students. The accountability of high school teachers for students' marks and the flexibility of those marks (which may be adjusted for bureaucratic reasons by teachers, principals, even on occasion the Ministry of Education) have the result that many students only experience a direct connection between studying (doing work) and learning (marks) when they come to college.

> *The responsibility sort of starts to pour out of you and you become a little more adult, and you see things differently from high school. I have seen now how homework is important. That it's really important, because you don't do your homework, you do bad on the test; you do your homework, you do incredibly good on the test.... I can only vouch for this with every single test I do. That's exactly the way it works. In high school, somehow it's a little different because you have your notes, and if you don't do your subject, you...flip through the notes, read through the notes, right, and you might do a little better or do good, even though you didn't do your homework. But in this case, your homework is your notes, and if you don't do them, it's like not studying at all and pffft, your tests go down the drain.*

Responsibility for learning is a major disjunction between high school and college. Could responsibility be shifted to students less abruptly? What would allow college student to take on responsibility rather than having it dumped on them? What would allow high school students to redirect into their studies the creative energy they currently put into avoiding work and creating imaginative explanations for why their work is not done, or not available for display (e.g. The dog ate it.)?

Action Strategies

College Teachers

- Recognize that not all first semester students have learned to be responsible for their own learning - college is where they learn this.
- Ease them into responsibility by assigning lightly weighted assignments very early in the term.
- Give students feedback early in the semester so they can learn that studying "pays off" (or, if it doesn't, they can adjust the way they study). To students, marks are the pay for their work. Would you work for three months before getting paid an unspecified amount?
- Give one reminder of the consequences of missing assignments.

High School Teachers

- Create more opportunities for "responsibility to pour out of" students.
- Negotiate responsibility contracts with students, e.g. they (not the teacher) are responsible for getting their daily homework done. Inform parents and principals of the pedagogical goals of this strategy.
- Allow students to choose to do work: Set seven quizzes or assignments, allow students to choose which five they will do.
- Establish firm due dates that have real consequences, and communicate these clearly to students and parents.
- Make sure students *experience* the connection between doing homework and learning, i.e. writing the notes *is* learning.

High School and College Teachers and Administrators

- Explore ways to build increasing levels of student responsibility into the curriculum.

You have to learn at some time you're not doing these things for your teacher any more, you're doing them for yourself.

APPENDIX B - RESEARCH METHODS

Data Collection

The principal data were interviews with Secondary V and first-year college students. The interviews averaged 45-50 minutes. The student interviews were supplemented by interviews with teachers, counsellors and administrators, and by classroom observations. Interviews were conducted during visits to the schools by the researchers. The secondary school teacher-researcher interviewed the second semester college students and observed in college classes. The college teacher-researchers interviewed Secondary V students and observed in secondary school classes. All researchers interviewed some first semester college students, but most were interviewed by college teacher-researchers. Except in one instance, the researchers did not teach any of the students' classes.

Summary of Data Collected

Interviews	
Secondary V students	43
First semester college students	27
Second semester college students	45
Teachers and counsellors	17
Fieldnotes	
Class observations	20
Meetings with principals	10

The interviews were carried out with two stratified random samples of students: one sample composed of students interviewed during their second semester of college and one sample composed of a cohort of students who were interviewed during their last term of secondary school and again during their first semester of college.

Sampling Strategy for Second Semester College Students

A list of students who enroled for their first semester in September, 1988, was obtained from the Registrar's Office. The list was stratified by secondary school of origin and the program of studies in which the students had enroled. This allowed a systematic random selection of students with respect to secondary school, program and gender. The number of students selected from each secondary school was proportional to the number of graduates from that school who entered John Abbott College in September, 1988. The sample of 50 students was composed of graduates from two Baldwin-Cartier Commission schools, four Lakeshore Board schools, one PSBGM school and two schools from the private sector.

The home telephone numbers of these students were obtained from the Registrar's Office. The students were contacted by phone to enlist their participation in the project and to schedule an interview appointment. Two students refused, two did not keep two or more appointments, and we were unable to locate one student; thus 45 second-semester students participated in phase one of the project.

Sampling Strategy for Secondary V Students

A cohort of students selected from Secondary V classes in Spring, 1989, were selected to be interviewed in both Secondary V and their first semester of college. From a sample of 50, 43 participated in interviews during Secondary V (phase one) and 27 participated in interviews during the first semester of college (phase two).

To obtain the original sample of 50 students, members of the research team met with the principal of each of the selected secondary schools in order to explain the project and to enlist the school's participation and cooperation. From a list of students with a second term grade average of 65% or greater, a systematic random sample was taken, maintaining an equal number of students of each gender. (We used the 65 per cent minimum average criterion because such students were most likely to maintain a final average which would qualify them for admission to the college.) At a preliminary interview with these selected students, we eliminated those students who did not plan to attend John Abbott College, explained the project to eligible students and ascertained their willingness to participate in an interview. Students were then given a letter to take home in order to secure parental permission. The final step in the process was to ensure that the permission slips were returned to the school.

The 50 Secondary V students were selected from schools in proportion to the number of graduates from each school who entered John Abbott College in September, 1988. Seven students were absent or unavailable on the days when researchers visited the schools; thus, 43 Secondary V students participated in phase one of the project. Of these 43 students, 28 were found to be registered at the college in September, 1989. All 28 agreed to participate in a second interview during their first semester at the college, however, one of these students did not keep either of two appointments.

Interviewing Strategy

Interviews with the second semester college students were conducted at the college between February and May, 1989. A secondary school teacher-researcher conducted all but two of these interviews. Interviews with Secondary V students were conducted in the student's schools by college teacher-researchers between March and May, 1989. Twenty seven of those students were interviewed again after they enroled in college. Interviews began in the third week of the semester (to obtain vivid first impressions) and continued through November, 1989, (to include students' later experiences).

Interviewers worked from a common core of topics, but strove to achieve a conversational style. The interview protocol evolved from a semi-structured interview technique based on a list of open-ended questions to a technique that we call guided conversation. In these guided conversations, we encouraged the students to take the lead and to tell their experiences in a narrative style rather than responding in a question-answer sequence. We evolved this technique to address the problem of the age and status differences between teacher-interviewers and student-interviewees. In the traditional question-answer interview style, the age and status differential tended to constrain student responses within the predictable and the socially acceptable. In guided conversation, the interviewer works to empower the students to set the agenda and shape their own stories. This evolution in interviewing technique was influenced by the work of Mishler (1986) and Belenky et al. (1986).

Analysis of Data

Interviews were recorded and verbatim transcripts were prepared from the audio tapes by a typist. The original interviewer then proofread and verified the transcript while listening to the recording. Transcripts of interviews were circulated to all researchers.

As we conducted the interviews, read and re-read the transcripts, themes became evident. We individually noted possible themes on "Data Analysis Note" forms (Appendix B.1). This preliminary phase was followed by the development of coding categories. Personal computers were used for the preparation of transcripts and in the coding and retrieval of the data. We used the textbase facility of *Nota Bene*, by Dragonfly Software, to retrieve sections of interviews for final analysis and interpretation.

In the first data analysis workshop, April 17th, the research team discussed narrative analysis and thematic coding with Dr. Prue Rains, a qualitative research methods specialist from McGill University. Using a sample of interview transcripts, we identified potential analytic categories. A summary of the workshop, prepared by Dr. Rains appears in Appendix C. Subsequently, the research team developed the coding categories for the second semester college students.

In the second data analysis workshop, November 13th, the research team identified salient themes in the interviews with students in the cohort sample, who were interviewed twice: in Secondary V and first semester college. Dr. Joan Stelling led this workshop and the summary of her analysis of a sample of these interviews appears in Appendix D.

The two data analysis workshops with independent consultants were organized to safeguard the validity of our analysis. The consultants, who are specialists in qualitative analysis, were each provided with randomly selected sample interviews. On their own, the consultants and the members of the research team studied the sample interviews, identified themes and suggested hypotheses. The consultants then met with the research team to share insights. These procedures assured that we were not overlooking or misinterpreting significant aspects of the data.

No safeguard is fail-safe, however. While the consultants are trained analysts, independent of college life, they are also university professors, and therefore might be expected to share some teacher biases and assumptions.

The variety of professional backgrounds of the members of the research team also contributed to the validity of our analysis. The team comprised secondary school and college teachers of natural science, social science, language and humanities. We kept each other honest by questioning assumptions and asking for explanations of interpretations of the data. We encouraged each other to look at our own classroom practices and institutional policies with the same critical eyes that functioned so effectively when we viewed the practices and policies of others.

We worked to assure the reliability of our analysis by achieving inter-rater consistency in the coding of interviews. We worked toward coding consistency in two ways: whole team coding and factorial dyad coding. In team coding, all individuals coded an interview, then met to resolve discrepancies and modify the codebook. In factorial dyad coding, rotating pairs of researchers coded interviews then met to resolve discrepancies. We developed the factorial dyad method in order to code the data more quickly as well as to assure consistency by allowing all researchers to work together on a rotating schedule.

B.1 Data Analysis Note Form

DATA ANALYSIS NOTE FORM

Researcher ______________________ Date ______________________

Theme, Topic, or Hypothesis	Evidence (For/Against)	Source (Reference # and Page)

APPENDIX C - SUMMARY REPORT FIRST DATA ANALYSIS WORKSHOP

June 6, 1989

To: Margaret Waller
Project Coordinator
Easing the Transition

From: Prue Rains
Department of Sociology
McGill University

Subject: Analyzing Qualitative Data
Discussion Session on April 17

Our discussion dealt with some of the general issues and practices involved in analyzing qualitative data, and brought these to bear the *Easing the Transition* project, using several interviews as source material. My presentation, and our discussion, covered the following topics.

A. Coding Qualitative Data - Determining what Coding Categories to Use

Why code? Qualitative data (in this project, from tape recorded and transcribed interviews) are often voluminous - coding is a method for retrieving all the material that bears on a given topic or theme, and is thus a method for keeping the analyst honest. Qualitative data, unlike quantitative data, are therefore coded for the purposes of retrieval rather than counting. (This means that coding categories for qualitative data need not be mutually exclusive, exhaustive, etc.)

What technology will be used to code and retrieve material? Qualitative researchers, who once depended on devices like McBee cards to code qualitative material for retrieval, can now use the computer and the data-base management capabilities of software programs like *Nota Bene.*

What categories? In determining what actual categories to use in coding qualitative material, it is important to understand that a preliminary analysis of the material has to precede the development of the coding categories. It is a mistake to think that coding the material will produce the analysis. Instead, it is the analysis - the identification of themes/topics/issues - that will produce the code and permit the retrieval of all relevant material bearing on the themes in question.

How does one determine what the themes will be? Obviously, there is no precise recipe for determining themes in qualitative material. However, as a starting point for reflection and discussion, it is useful to go through several transcribed interviews, underlining the key passages - the sections of the interview that contain interesting and significant material. These passages point to issues, topics, themes, coding categories.

Illustrative theme areas: in the course of our discussion of several transcribed interviews with first-year college students, for example, we began to identify several areas of student experience ("themes", coding categories) central to the "transition" experience - not that these are categories, not hypotheses or conclusions:

1) registration process and the "selection" of courses (the classes selected are usually unavailable);

2) the whole issue and moral evaluation that appears to surround "dropping" courses (why is dropping courses "bad"?);

3) skipping classes - the new freedom;

4) life in a "bigger" school (implications for friends, classes, etc);

5) the student's view of teachers (high school and college) and of college courses (good and bad);

6) the issue of "interests" (not knowing what their interests are, discovering new ones, the whole issue of their 'field,' 'major,' life plans, etc.);

7) performance; doing well and not doing well;

8) making friends.

Using these themes as coding categories, the analyst could therefore retrieve all the material about "skipping classes" (category 3), for example, from interviews with entering college students.

The scheme for coding the interviews with entering college students will differ from the coding scheme for the interviews with high school students and teachers of both kinds - the experiences of each group are different, and, insofar as the interviews focused on life in college, the interviews of both teachers and high school students are based less on experience than conjecture or rumour. (The interview with each of the four groups should be analyzed separately.)

B. Two Methods for Doing the Actual Coding

The actual coding of qualitative data from interviews can be carried out in one of two ways, each of which has its distinctive advantages and disadvantages.

1. Across Interviews

Using this method, the transcripts for all interviews with the designated group (here, entering college students) are marked and coded - such that, at the analysis stage, all the material bearing on "skipping classes" can be retrieved and examined. This is the method generally implied in the discussion above, and is also the only method that can be used for coding field work data (data based on participant observation rather than interviews).

2. Within Interviews

As an alternate method, coding categories can be used essentially to cut and reorganize the contents of each interview separately, but in the same order. Interviews with women who have had abortions can, for instance, be reduced (by eliminating extraneous material and retaining only key passages) and rearranged following the same conceptual outline (coding scheme). So, instead of having to work with 20 interviews that are each 25 pages long, one can work with 20 "crystallized" interviews - each containing key material organized into the same conceptual outline.

For some kinds of experience (abortion is a good example), it is useful for the analyst not to lose the "individual" through coding. Like the first method described, this method permits one to look at one area of experience across interviews (but somewhat more awkwardly) without losing the individual as a possible unit of analysis.

This method is most easily used when the experience about which people are being interviewed falls into some natural, common sequence (as does the experience of acquiring an abortion).

Either method could reasonably be employed for this project. The experiences of students did not strike me as being unusual enough to require use of the second method. But the exercise of pruning and rearranging interviews so as to retain, crystallize and order students' core experiences might be more useful in fostering theoretical insights and discussion than settling on a code and turning the work of coding over to others.

APPENDIX D - SUMMARY REPORT SECOND DATA ANALYSIS WORKSHOP

Consultant Report
by
Joan Stelling

Interview Transcripts Reviewed: E1131134, E1131234; K1123141, K1123241; Second semester student (no I.D.).

I will begin with a very brief statement of some general comments based on initial impressions of the interviews. I will then report the students' expectations, based on the high school interviews. Following this, I will discuss the experiences they report during their first few weeks at colleges and compare them with their expectations.... Finally, I will discuss some tentative hypotheses/conclusions based on the paired interviews, and taking into account the data from the second semester student.

General Comment

The high school experience, as portrayed by these students, bears no resemblance to the one I remember. I am particularly struck by the portrayal of a high degree of control and extensive checking by the high school teachers. Were one to assume the accuracy of this portrayal, one would have to conclude that students are unlikely to learn to be independent and take responsibility in their high school classrooms.

Their sources of information are about what one would expect. Although pamphlets are mentioned in terms of specific information, e.g. course offerings, their expectations are largely based on things they have been told by friends, siblings, and teachers.

High School Interviews

Common Expectations: The two high school students are strikingly similar in their expectations of colleges. Even though they expect things to be very different, they do expect that they will be able to adapt to the new setting within 1-2 months. In addition, they anticipate that:

1. They will have to take more responsibility. Things will be harder at college - there won't be any spoon-feeding (my term); they will have to look things up on their own, find the information they need. It will be up to the student to do the assignments, meet deadlines, attend class. Teachers will not watch over them as they do in high school.

2. Students will be more serious than they are in high school, because they choose to go to college; there will be fewer "delinquents", fewer "smartalecks".

3. Teachers will be not that different; will be helpful, although may have to go to teacher's office to get help (not as much help given in class).

Expectations Voiced by One Student: The following expectations were expressed by one (of two) students:

1. College will be bigger - more students, more buildings, bigger buildings.

2. Days will be longer and more varied; the routine will be better.

3. Expects that current set of friends will stay together, as they have through all their schooling up to now.

Initial College Interviews

Common Experiences: The two students even more similar in terms of their reactions and experiences during the first few weeks of college, and there is a fairly good match between their earlier expectations and their actual experiences. They find that they are working harder than they did in high school, although they are not finding it too difficult, at least so far. As expected, they have found that attendance is not taken in many of the classes. Related to this is the recognition that they have to be more responsible. These two students talked about responsibility at both time periods; what seems to have been added in the interviews done at Time 2 is the theme of "freedom". Whether and/or how the students see any relationship between freedom and responsibility may become clearer with the examination of additional interviews.

Both students find the college big compared to high school (one had expected this); one student comments that the teachers are more impersonal, and that they can't really be expected to know the names of all their students. Even though this student professes to understand why the teachers don't know her name, one suspects that she finds it difficult to be no more than a face in the crowd.

Neither student anticipated the effect of different courses and different schedules on their relationships with old friends. They find that they don't see their old friends very much, and this necessitates making new friends. So far, however, this does not pose any problems; both report finding it easy to make new friends in classes and labs.

While both students anticipated that things would be different in colleges and require some adaptation, neither thought that this adaptation would be a real problem for them. This expectation seems to be fulfilled during their first few weeks in college. The students point to a number of things that take some getting used to and some adjustment on their part, but they say there have not been any real problems or difficulties.

Experiences Reported by One Student: One student finds that things at the college are "more social." But while s/he reports that it is "more fun," s/he also finds that the "distractions" (e.g. concerts) and the desire to spend time with friends compete with the need to attend class, and that s/he must learn to "prioritize".

The student who was really looking forward to moving from the repetitive similarity of days in high school to the more varied schedules of colleges now finds that s/he misses high school. This student is nostalgic for high school, where things were "easier" and there was a "better" (more regular) routine.

Hypotheses / Conclusions

The comments in this section are based on the review of all five interviews and on some of the points that emerged in the discussion at the data analysis workshop.

The students anticipated that they would have to work harder and did not find that to pose major difficulties during their first few weeks in college. To judge from the second semester interview, however, one might expect difficulties to loom larger in their perspectives as they move further into the school year. It seems likely that the students do not yet have a very good understanding of what "more work" means. They believe they are more focused on learning than they were, and they have begun to recognize that they must do more independent study, must learn how to study, and must learn how to "learn", as opposed to "memorize"; but they do not seem to have a clear idea of what is meant by these things nor how to accomplish them. They have not yet come face to face with the possibility that they, themselves, might fail, even though they know that others have.

Much like the farm girl who finds herself transplanted to an urban setting, the students are nostalgic for their earlier small community (the high school) where things were simpler, more familiar, people knew each other (they were known), their circle of friends was intact, and teachers gave more to the students. One interpretation of this is that the students' sense of who they are, their self-perceptions, were based on, and confirmed by, their relationships and interaction with others in that small community. By moving out of it, they have lost, albeit temporarily, much of the support for this sense of identity.

The move from high school to college involves a transition from "insider" to "outsider" status, and part of the adjustment process involves becoming an insider in a new setting. This is not always accomplished without pain. Students may find, as they move through the school year, that the friends that seemed so easy to acquire during the first few weeks are really no more than classroom acquaintances. Their real friends are their old friends, who are now much less available, and they find it difficult to build new friendships. In this connection, one wonders how much experience these students have had in building new friendships. How many of them are similar to the one who reports having gone all the way through school with the same group of friends? Earlier moves from one level of school to the next may not have involved the same kind of dispersal of old friends. It seems likely that many of the entering students have not had a lot of experience as an outsider or newcomer.

The interviews contain the idea or theme that how serious one is, how hard one is willing to work, and the (presumed) consequent academic failure or success, are functions of whether one is enroled in the program and courses of one's choice. During the discussion of failure at the workshop, it occurred to me that this belief seems to be a way of legitimizing failure.[1] One of the questions to be investigated here is whether this belief is more characteristic of the college, than the high school, culture and thus something which is acquired or strengthened during the student's sojourn in college.[2]

It seems likely that many of the experiences reported by these students are typical of transitions between developmental stages. From the things I hear from my own students, I would guess that the transition from colleges to university involves similar kinds of experiences. During registration, for example, some seem bewildered by the number of choices they have and by being given the responsibility to do their own scheduling. In courses, there is a discrepancy between the amount of direction they seem to want and the amount I think appropriate for university students. I know little about their friendship networks, but I certainly find myself dealing with students who do not seem very well connected to other students. They don't know anyone from whom to borrow notes when they miss class. They don't seem to be part of the student-to-student "pipeline" of information, so they are not privy to student knowledge about ways to study; how to decide what's important; how to determine what they absolutely must do and what they can ignore; how to survive, and perhaps even enjoy, university.

Recognizing the commonality of difficulties or problems deriving from transitions underlines the importance of investigating their effects and devising strategies to reduce or neutralize their negative aspects. I suspect that teachers at all levels of the educational system have a lot to learn about ways to "ease" these transitions so that they become more constructive and valuable learning experiences.

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[1] Failure is ordinarily perceived as something negative, or blameworthy - something that reflects negatively on those who fail. To "legitimize" failure implies a way of defining or explaining it that is supported by group norms (or the collectivity) and that authorizes it or makes it "rightful". Normative support is a necessary component of legitimization. To "rationalize" failure, by contrast, implies an excuse or justification used by the individual to deflect the blame or neutralize the negative aspects. Rationalization does not have the normative support necessary to redefine failure as legitimate and therefore as something that does not reflect negatively on the individual.

[2] I don't mean to imply that this belief is in any way unique to these kinds of settings. There are a number of parallel and congruent beliefs in the wider society. An example here is the belief that people will do better work if they like what they are doing, or the belief that workers who have some autonomy or choice in, and control over, their work will be more satisfied with their work and that, thereby, they will do better work.

APPENDIX E - SAMPLE INTERVIEW: SECOND SEMESTER STUDENT

So the first semester, then, for you, how did it go?

It was pretty good. It went, actually, very well. I ended up getting very high marks. But I had to study and I made some sacrifices and the beginning of the semester was kind of tough because I was still in high school. I found the hardest part of the transition was two things: One, was still being in high school and Grade Eleven is the most important year to get good marks in high school for CEGEP. As well, it's the year you have the most fun. You're the oldest and you can have a car, grad, grad ski. It's very hard, especially, the last semester, the last term, to keep up your marks. Alot of my friends and myself went down alot.

In Grade Eleven?

Yeah. It's hard to think, Okay, you've got to work right now. The sun is smiling and.... Another thing I found really hard was I didn't like Pure and Applied. I want to go into medicine and the whole of the summer I took all the workshops they suggested I take, the transition, etc. and I asked them all the questions about what courses I need to take, and they were always very polite and very nice, but I never ended up getting the correct information, and what I ended up doing was that I could have gone for all the advanced subjects rather than the low ones and they suggested to me to go for the low lones. I didn't realize until like now that I'm going to have to do some summer school work because I need some more. Now if they'd only told me that week.... What are the courses I need to get into Medicine, at [university] or something. Even if you need different courses for different universities, they should by now know. Just tell me that you need this, this, this, etc. I didn't need to take all my very simple courses, right? They're not that simple, they're still pretty tough. But, like, if I dropped the Physics and taken the Biology instead then I would have fit all the science courses in four semesters. Now I'm probably going to have to take one in the summer.

You said that you found the beginning of the semester kind of tough.

Well, what I do is, it goes very fast, 15 weeks. The first week you don't do anything except get your books. The second week, Oh, we haven't learned anything yet; there's no reason to study. It's very hard to understand the idea that just because you don't have a test coming up doesn't mean you're not studying. Throughout the whole of my high school, I would always be cramming the last two days and neglect the work. The idea that just because the teacher hasn't given homework doesn't mean that you don't have any homework.

So you feel that the college teachers aren't.....

I find at first - and alot of my friends as well - I find it very difficult to take responsibility. They've been pampered all their lives by the teachers. I like it better this way. They care but you have to make the first approach. You have to go to their office after the hours, you have to ask. But it's not like university where I've heard you're just a number and a name and they don't care. But they found all this rather difficult. Even I did. I found it was okay after awhile like after my first test. Luckily I had classes which gave not big assignments but little assignments in the beginning so once you got those back you had some marks and it caught on. But as I said before, the lack of your responsibility about going to classes and not taking attendance and following after you.... Alot of my friends skipped alot of classes. Even I skipped a few and you have to get notes from somebody and it ends up like.... A friend of mine who wants to go to law school, now, has practically cut that off because he's failed three courses of which one was just a gym course because he skipped so many classes.

You said that in high school you found that before a test you could cram the night before, and that worked.

Even in the first semester, you have to kind of work because the course material is very similar to what we did in high school. I took all the advanced courses in high school so it's all very similar and I could get by with just past knowledge. But now this semester I know that I have to do math every time I have math class or else.... I got a 69 on my first test which is good for some people but not for me and I really pulled up my mark in the second test after I'd been doing homework every single day. I got a 92, so there's an improvement.

How did you find out that you had to do the homework every single day?

Trial and error. Like I said to my Math teacher, Math is my worst subject. It's still a great mark but it's my worst subject relatively. We had quizzes and the first quiz I had I had like a 13 out of 20 and I realized these weekly quizzes are a real pain, so I've got to study for it every week but that way I'm learning and it makes me do the work which is great compared to the class I had where compared to [other] class we just talked, talked, talked and then halfway through the semester you had an assignment or something like that or a test. You're sitting there, I've got to know all this stuff in less than two days? I can't even remember what we did three months ago. And it goes so fast, the fifteen weeks.

You said you found out how to keep on top of it by trial and error. Do you feel that somewhere you could have been told something about how to do that?

I find that the whole time they're always telling me, they were scaring us. We were more scared than anything else. You have this many hours for this, this many hours for this and then transportation and it looked like I can never handle CEGEP. I was freaking out. I work part time, and I still go out during weekends. I found that no matter how many times they tell you, you have to put your hand in the fire to know you can burn yourself before anything will happen.

That's a good way to put it.

I experimented even though you have this course program planner and learning how to study and all that. I experimented on my own schedules. I'll come home and study, study, study, take a break, eat, and study, study, study. In fact, the first semester I found, even more than this semester, that about half way through the semester I tried to make a schedule but I found it too hard to keep to it. I had an ideal thing and if somebody messed it up.... I found that like Mom was always asking me to make a schedule, make a schedule. She felt that was the best way. And I found that life in CEGEP was too fluid. I can't have a fixed time. What I do is, whenever I have free time I sit down and I study, and that's the trick. You can go out and you can do everything but you've got to know you cannot procrastinate. That's my worst problem. If first semester students can stop procrastinating and just do everything he wants and--he can do everything except procrastination - it eats away the....

What do you mean by CEGEP life being fluid?

Well, there are so many things to do. You feel, "Okay, I've got an hour and-a-half break and I'll study for my Math." Then, Look, something is at the Agora and let's go see it. Or, you come home and you find that you have to go to work today instead of tomorrow. Well, I was going to study today not tomorrow. You have to compensate and just things like that. Also, it's not the same timetable as like high school - 8:00 to 2:30. You make your own schedule.

In the first semester did you have breaks in your schedule?

I had one break which ran from 10:00 until 2:30.

That's quite a break.

Yeah. What I ended up doing was...because I also want to know about university and it would help me. I ended up finding out all these things. Like now where I have to take an extra Math.

Was that useful for you?

Yeah. I found that I helped alot of students. I knew I wasn't going to study for 4 ½ hours. If I wasn't there, I was going to be with my friends or something. So I said I might as well do it. I usually found that by then I needed to have the extra break. I find in the first semester you'll be slack the first few weeks, then you'll work hard, and then toward the end where you really have to make the effort and you start to burn out: I don't want to do this, I'll wait for tomorrow and I'll just curl up in bed with a book or I'll just go out with my friends. It's very hard to make the effort. What makes you catch up is the six weeks break which helps you. I found that I would come home and for about three-quarters of the semester, I had never watched prime time TV. Sometime in November, when I sat down on a Sunday night, and I actually stayed and watched an 8:00 show. That was special but then once you get caught with it you want to keep getting at it.

Do you think that's something that's happening to alot of people?

Perhaps. I find that most probably it's happened to everybody. They catch the skipping bug; you get "skipatitus." It's one class.... Okay, I missed one class and then just another class and just to finish for the week, I'll get the notes. Oh-oh, we had a test. Oh, well, I don't want to go back because now I'll get in trouble. Oh, Oh, I can't go back now because they're going to ask me where I was last time so I can't go down. That's what happened to my friend. Especially when he had another friend and his other friend didn't tell him his assignment, so he ended up getting 24% in [the course]. He's a really bright student and he had like an 86 average in high school, but it was just because he skipped so many times and he didn't hand in his assignments. Skipping is a big problem.

Let's talk a little more about that.

Yeah. I found out that what he ended up doing, especially this semester. Last semester he ended up skipping like five times a week at least. Now he'd only skip one or two times a week. Especially near the end of that last semester, he found out how bad he was going down. He'd have little rules for himself. If I'm going to skip this hour-and-a-half, that means I'm going to work. If I'm going to skip this hour-and-a-half, it's for a useful purpose and I'm not just going to go out with my friends. I'm either going to be working on the assignments I have to do for this course or another one there. He found that there was a time for recreation and time for not. The idea of skipping, even though you have more recreational time, in the end, he felt that, "If I'm going to break that it has to be for work." It was his little alibi for himself.

Did it work?

He still ended up by failing. It didn't exactly help. No.

What's he doing this semester?

He's doing alot better. He's still finding it hard. Now he's getting infuriated because he's going out once a week and working as soon as he gets home or the next morning, and he's still finding it tough. He can't understand how.... Last semester he found Math hard but it was because he wasn't studying hard, he wasn't working so hard. Now, he's really working hard on tests. He thought it was a really easy test and he got a 60 on it, or a 69 or 70. And he was hoping for alot better mark. The big thing in his specific case (I'll get back to the generalization) is that he wants to be a lawyer and he found out that to go into Law [at a specific university] - that was the big place where he wanted to go - you need at least an 86 average. And when you're automatically told, "Okay CEGEP is very hard, very tough, and it's impossible to get good marks, plus you're going to have to get an 86." It was kind of like a crushing blow after slacking off the first week and finding out your first mark was - I'm never going to get, I give up. And if subconsciously he gave up then, I'll skip, I'll skip, it doesn't matter anymore. And it's so tough because if you mess up your first semester, it's really hard to get in. You realize afterwards and you've really paid for the mistake. You may not think later but the difference between four semesters in CEGEP and five is such a difference in universities.

Why do you think that is?

Because there are so many applicants for universities when they want the top and if you can't handle CEGEP I guess they feel you're not fit for university.

So you think they would pick someone who did it in four semesters before they'd pick someone who did five?

Yes. In fact the counsellors stressed that.

Is that true of all the universities?

Probably not. Probably the more prestigious ones. To be specific if you go for professional Law, it's important to get into a good university.

You said he's doing a little less skipping this semester?

Right and it's improving his marks. He's really trying hard. He gets frustrated, and he's realizing that the less work you're just going to be getting by. Like... he did everything extra. He made a print out of a flow chart when it was optional, you didn't even have to do a flow chart. He did everything. He typed it out and everything. He was to hand it in on Thursday and the class was cancelled on Thursday. Monday he goes to hand it in and the guy said, Okay, you hand it in next Thursday if you wish. And he goes, "Some people already handed it in last Thursday," and he was really annoyed because he *worked on this for last Tuesday and the guy was nowhere to be seen. He went to his office and he's feeling, "I worked on all this just to show him how much I worked and some people already handed it in. When was this?" He feels frustrated. Even if he works hard in Math, he's still not doing as good as he hopes. When he does a really good job, people never seem to notice.*

Has he found a source of help? Do you think that's an answer to his problems?

No, which is a problem.

Why do you think he has trouble getting help?

It's not that there isn't help to be gotten in this school, it's just that you don't know where to go. Even if it's advertised - You want help, go here - you feel kind of stupid saying, Okay I need some help. "Okay, what's your problem?" I don't know. It's hard to find out what your problem is.

Do you think that's a general thing that students feel? Like it's not easy to go and get help? Have you yourself ever sought out help?

To go into the first semester I sought alot of help and they were very nice and everything but I never got the important information, which was a pity. So now I don't go. Now I go it by myself. I'll go to the career shop and look at things myself. It's not that I don't trust them, it's just that I've been burned before.

What if you wanted to approach a teacher for help or your friend? Say in Math?

I was telling him exactly. This is CEGEP and you're supposed to go to the teacher and he would, Ahhhh! He's supposed to. If you're having problems, go see the teacher after class. The class is just lecture and you go and ask him for help afterwards. It's not like they're babying after you. Nobody actually realizes that. It's a big thing. My Math teacher last semester was saying, "Okay, this class 40% of you guys failed. Two people came to see me and that's not good. You should all come to see me, even people who are getting 90's just to ask about problems and nobody listens." You say, "Okay, I've got a break now, let's go eat. Let's go down to Annies."

So that's why they don't go?

Yeah. Well, they don't realize that there's help there. They feel they're invading his time. It's not. He has his office hours for you to go see him.

That's right. That's what he's paid to do.

Exactly.

You said you found you had to make some sacrifices.

Okay. In the first semester because if I wanted to have a higher average - I was going to go to [university]. It would be on a scholarship and things like this. And I had, especially with work, I had to make sure - my parents only let me work one day a week. But that was impossible, they'd have to make me quit. So I decided, "Okay I'll make two days available and you can schedule me anytime over those two days," which was Fridays and Saturdays. I ended up doing about 3 ½ hours or 4 hours work on Friday and about an average shift on Saturday. Then I found out I only made myself one day a week because the week is meant for studying, just to keep on course, the weekend. When I originally made my schedule up before, was that I would get home, study, study, study, dinner, study, study, study, and bed. Then, I would have a complete, free weekend. My mom was getting on my case and saying, "This is impossible. First of all, you're not going to come home and study, study, study. You're going to be tired. You're going to get yourself a snack and you're going to leave your whole weekends free. No, you cut down a bit during the week and you can study some on the weekend." But it ended up, even though it's fluid, you kind of end up doing something. It's come down to: I get home, and theoretically I should be studying until dinner, which I never really end up doing. I just do the preliminary, organize the books, read a bit and never really study, eat dinner and then I'll go and study until as long as it's needed. If there's a test coming up then I'll come home and study and I'll study on the breaks. Weekends, I'll usually work until around 8:00 and either do a preliminary homework then or go out, go to bed, whenever. I find I have to go home early because I [go to work early] in the morning on Saturday, work until about 3:00 and then I feel dead. And then that's supposed to be my time for homework. And I find I procrastinate alot because I'm tired and I work out and I feel more tired and.... Saturday I might even be able to go out again on Saturday night if I work on Saturday. Sunday is my homework day. Last chance. As time flows, big essays. Time for the project you forgot.

So you're finding that a successful strategy this semester?

Yes. Everyone has to find their own strategy. You've got to know that I can't go out this weekend. I can't go out during the middle of the week. If I do then I'm sacrificing school and I have to make it up. It's like I said.

How long do you think it took you to sort of evolve that successful strategy?

About a month and-a-half at least. It took until like mid-semester. It's mid-semester now. The biggest thing is the time; that you're doing a full piece of work in less than half a year compared to high school and you say, Okay, I'll *just skip one class. One class is not like a high school class. You've got like three times the amount of work and alot of people don't realize that. It goes so fast and you've really got to adjust very quickly. Which a lot of people find hard.*

And what happens if they don't adjust?

Then they become like my friend. They really need to adjust.

If you really try and remember what it was like those first couple of weeks when you came in, can you remember some of the impressions that you had?

*I came in and it was completely crowded the first day. You can't get to the water fountain, you can't get to the library because you have to wade through. It was interesting to see everybody your age and you realize, you sit there and you stop, and if you look past the faces which you think of as your peers, right, and you look around like everybody's an adult which is both interesting and scary because it kind of made me take a responsbility. Now, I've got to start working. It was just things like, you come into the classroom and the teacher's there and he'll say, "Okay, my name is Mr. **** or whatever and your name is?" He starts immediately, especially in the sciences, giving lectures immediately and we're sitting there: "We don't even have our books yet, sir!" It's both fun and serious. What course do you have? Oh, him. He's a good teacher and he's not a good teacher. What really helped was to have alot of people, friends, who were already in CEGEP and they gave me a good overview of the place.*

What kind of things did they tell you?

They were telling me a good trick. If you're going to go into first semester, ask your friends or your brothers and sisters what are the good courses. I think the main element of survival which I find really sad about CEGEP is, it's not the course you like. If you're going to go on to university, it's the mark you get. No matter how pitiful the course is, say that between two courses there's something that you really enjoy and something that you don't. But you find out from your friends one is easier than the other and you try your hardest to go for that one.

The easy one?

Right. Or, for the sciences, you have to find out who is a good teacher and who's not. I'm not going to name names, but if you're stuck with a bad teacher or a very tough teacher then it really affects your mark. People in university are not going to say, "Okay, that was a nice hard C or that's an easy A." It's just so full, you really have to go for the hard ones. In fact, another thing, especially in the sciences. Social students can, I guess, get away with *it. They find, "Okay, since this is an easy course then I'll skip more because it's an easier one. I'm allowed." Then it works in reverse and they'll schedule it so there are Fridays free or something and they end up. The idea of having a Friday free is that you're supposed to be studying that Friday. No, they're going to go skiing.*

You really have to get a good teacher or a good course. You've got to know (a) what's interesting to you. You've got to sort out (a) - You go through your whole workbook and you come to the first day in the middle of summer and you dread opening your books. You're scared, and this is a thick book, and I'm choosing my life here. I hear registration is all bad and everything. So you open the book and there are thousands of courses to choose from. You don't even know exactly, Oh, oh, Humanities 3 or Humanities 4. Does this go from one first or two first, you don't know. So it really helps to either go to pre-registration seminars and everything. You're supposed to; that's manditory to go to. They're a little bit late scheduled because by then, I found out at least, that I had already made up a schedule that was all redundant. I guess for other people, it is very important. As for the summer courses, I guess they try to help but it's too generalized. Do you know what I'm trying to say? It was so early that people hadn't opened up their books and didn't know what to ask yet. Yet, it was too far away for anything to sink it and it was so general it was like, "Okay, study, you've got to study this many hours a week and this, this, this. Okay, but it's summer, and I don't care right now," you know. It was just scheduling and the registration that was very scary and the idea that you walk away from the scheduling and no matter if you made a mistake or not, even if it's your error or not. Another thing I was really sad about... which I'll get to later about registration, about which I made a complete mess of. The idea that you walk out of registration and those are the courses you have. You can't switch courses, you can't do anything. You either have to drop them and if you drop them forget your idea of university there. It's very hard to make decisions especially when you don't know what these courses are. The very important idea that you have to stress to people is that you may spend two hours in registration, three hours, or five hours. It doesn't matter how long you stay there because the little amount of time you're going to save there, going to a party with your friends afterwards, you're going to pay for it when you get there.

All through the semester actually.

You should make up your schedules.... A really good idea to do is make up your schedules beforehand. Instead of making up thousands of schedules and tossing them out because that one doesn't work, that one doesn't work, you stick to one schedule and for every course you have three or four back-ups which you've written down on a piece of paper. Let's say, "Okay, my English is cancelled, right, I want this English. That one is cancelled so I want this one or I want this one." Which is good because in the last registration, I went through six Humanities courses and I still didn't end up getting the one I *wanted but I was lucky to have a sixth. I would have had to go back in line and go back in line. If you're up there, they'll let you. If you have one immediately you can type it in. But if you have to go back and line up you're going to waste so much time. A lot of people, what they also do is, the advisors will tell you, make sure you have time for lunch. I found by my reaction you don't really need the lunch area. For you when you're going to school, it doesn't make a difference if you have a small break at 11:30 or at 1:00. You don't have to need an hour and-a-half break. All it's going to do is make you have fun the one-and-a-half hour and Oh, if I don't want to go to class, I'll have some more. Everybody agrees with me that the best idea is (the majority of my friends) it's best to get it over with at 8:30 in the morning, and it would be better to go from 8:30 to 2:30 everyday than 8:30 to 5:30 with huge breaks in between. Of course, you're only going to get a very good schedule like this if you make sacrifices in things like four courses or one(?) I'd say it's real important to get the teachers and the courses. Either the easier ones or the teachers which will really teach you and still give good marks but you end up saying, I learned something in that course...*

You were saying there are bad teachers, tough teachers. Let's start with good/bad and what you define as....

Okay. A bad teacher - I've been lucky because I made sure I was not going to get a bad teacher. Last semester I started at 8:30 everyday and three days a week I went until 5:30. And it was because I wanted to get the good teachers. It's very hard when you see just a list of names because you don't know who they are.

How do you find it?

I asked all my friends. They went through my book and said good, good, good, no, no. Any I chose from what they said was good and bad, the good ones and the bad ones.

What is their definition of good?

Their definition of good was probably someone who can teach. The main priority is somebody who can teach well and somebody who wouldn't be very stingy in marks. It's all very nice to have - it's great to have a teacher who will teach you in everything but you need to have high marks.

There's something wrong with the CEGEP system in that you can't get the courses you like because if you get low marks in these courses because they're tough courses, it ruins your CEGEP. What happened at registration that I said was important. Okay, I'll come back to teachers. I went to Checkpoint: Check all your check list to make sure you're allowed to go into every class. What had happened was I went for an English course with one of my favorite teachers now - I took her again this semester - for "xxxx" because I thought *it was going to be a great course. None of my friends told me about that, I did that on my own. In the workbook, it was a regular course. But in registration they changed it to a Literature and something or other. It means a much easier course and you needed a placement form. Now at Checkpoint the lady was very angry at me because I took all the easy courses. She kept looking down the list. Okay, you took this course, you couldn't have taken an easier course. Why are all the advisors telling you to take the easy courses? The longest time I spent in registration was convincing this lady that these are the courses I wanted, and because she was talking about the science courses, she let me go by accidentally on the English. The day after they sent the courses to Québec, my teacher - I got back my test and I got 100% or something and she said, This is very good. She said, What did you get last semester in English? I said, 90 something or 88 or 89. She said, you're not supposed to be in here. And they'd made a mistake and they couldn't correct it. It made a great mark for me on the test but I was feeling like, "If you can't handle this how am I supposed to handle it? You guys are letting me slip through your fingers?"*

Is that what you meant when you said that registration made a mess of you?

Yeah, it was that and the advisor there telling me to take all the easy courses without.... I told every one of them that I was going for Medicine. They said, "If you're going for Medicine then you can go for an easy first semester and get a high average." But they didn't tell me, "Don't go for all the easy courses because this is how many courses you actually need." The majority of the courses I took last semester are not requirements. So now I'm stuck. Good teachers, bad teachers. A bad teacher is one that may know his stuff but either he can't teach well, or he doesn't care, or he just doesn't care and he doesn't teach well. He confuses more than he helps. There's a couple of teachers or even amongst C1 teachers, my friend was saying, "If you can't get into [a certain class, if] you're going to get in his class as that's the only one open, don't even take [the course]. You're going to end up failing, he'll confuse you and he'll ruin your life." There are a couple of teachers that will do that to you. Usually, the ones which are good teachers are tough but, fair, or they teach, and you have to understand, and they'll give you the marks. Some teachers which will "Okay, I cannot give 100%." There's one teacher where I really did extra work in everything and I should have gotten 100% - I should have gotten 103% - in marks. He only gave me 98%. He was saying, "I can't give you're the highest mark I've ever given in all the time I've taught here, but I'm not going to give you 100% because it will make the course look too easy." I'm sitting there, "There are 17 people in your class and 13 failed, it doesn't look like an easy course." I needed it for a scholarship and the extra 2 points count. But he still wouldn't give it to me and I took him again this semester. He's not a good teacher but I overcame that.

Okay, why did you take him though if you say he's not a good teacher?

Because I knew I could overcome him again. I knew... Okay, I took him originally because I liked the course. I went in and the first two days I just laughed. I looked at him and he was trying to teach and I couldn't help from laughing and he'd write notes on the board and he'd say, "Okay, you have to know these wars. Okay these wars look a little boring a bit of a fight but that's it." And then on the test he wants to know three-quarters of a page detailed writing on this. He didn't say anything. He rambled for three days about...and it wasn't even going to be on the test. It got frustrating. Nobody in the class listened. I was the only person taking notes, which really didn't help and what I had to do was the night before or two nights before was read the text, make my own notes and teach myself.

While we're talking about teachers, do you hear much about people talking about the difference between high school teachers and college teachers?

Probably during the first semester or when they're complaining. This teacher is good, this teacher is bad, this one doesn't care. The main thing is that they all felt that the teachers in high school cared more either for good or for ill. My friend, he can't handle it here. He really likes someone to take care of him and saying, Pull up your marks. He doesn't realize you have to go to him. He's there, he cares, he wants to help but you have to make the first step. There are so many people he has to take care of.... High school teachers are always there. "Were you skipping last week?" "I want to see a note from your parents." He just finds it much harder.

The big differences between high school and college.

There isn't much of a difference it's just another step in the evolution of your education. You get to primary school from pre-school and you have mommy by the hand.... It's just more of your taking responsibilty and figuring out that this is your life. You can skip and you can do nothing all you want or you can get moving. It takes everyone a different amount of time to realize that. Even now I'll say, Okay I know that but I'll still procrastinate. I'll still say tomorrow.... And, I'll still pay for it.

Do you miss anything about high school?

Yeah. I miss the lack of responsibility. I miss being [unclear]. Skipping your class or, another thing is like my friend. Another big thing was that he had a relationship with a girl, which he really enjoyed and that started going sour. In high school it's okay and you can skip a month by not feeling well or something like that and you'll catch up. Here, you have to always be in top academic shape. It's different. You have fun in high school but you can't really have fun here. You have fun here that you can't really have in high school. It's hard to describe the difference. You find that in Grade Eleven it's a europhic feeling. You're sitting there up in the clouds. Everybody is *below you, you're in the highest grade. Here a grade doesn't count. That was another interesting thing. You've been here three semesters? I thought you came here with me. It doesn't matter about the age anymore. While there it matters so much. You're going out with a Grade Ten girl? Oh, my goodness. It's just that it goes by so fast. You sit there and there's always something to do. Here, there's so much to do and you have to sacrifice, cut back, you go do other things. You can only do a little bit of everything. Or, if you go and concentrate on one thing then you don't expand on the other things.*

What were things that surprised you when you got here?

The lack of difference in age. [Pause] The price of the books! Another thing which you may say to other people is that I got a book list and I went and I phoned everybody up as soon as I got my courses. There's a trick which all people after the first semester know. You don't buy second hand books unless you know for certain that you need that book - until the first week. The book list is going to change, they're going to add books. I ended up buying, I think, $10 worth of books, my Chemistry books, and they ended up being obsolete because they brought out a new edition. You can't sell those back because they're obsolete. People don't realize that. But you buy a brand new book and they say, "We're not going to use it this year. We're going to do something different this year." The dreaded words are, "We're going to do something different this semester." No, no, no!

You talked about how when you got here you had friends who had been here before and gave you really valuable information. What was some of that information?

The courses you take, planning your schedule, things an academic advisor wouldn't tell you.

Like what?

Things about no lunches. The idea of which teachers are good and which teachers are bad, the idea of how to sneak into courses and things like that. Getting to know a teacher, or if you know a teacher from last semester, to get him - because his course is closed. Going up to him and he may open it for you. They do that a lot and the idea that, hang around. If you're late in the afternoon alot of courses are closed. If you hang around until 5:30 or until they close registration, you can still pick it up. They'll open the courses for you because they want to get you out of there. They'll learn little tricks of the trade.

If you were talking to a Grade Eleven student, who is thinking about CEGEP, what sort of stuff would you tell them?

To have fun in Grade Eleven because it's probably the last time you can have fun with impunity. Also, you don't slack up on marks. You can't say, "I'm not going to do this assignment because I'm going to go to CEGEP and it doesn't matter. I've had good marks the last three semesters," because you start to plummit, you know. It's not hard to get into CEGEP but it's not that easy. I have a friend who still hasn't made it in. Or had a friend. Anyway! You really have to keep your marks up. Enjoy yourself in the Summer and be prepared to work in the Fall. The main thing is you just have to work. It's just hard to gel it in the present mind. Looking back, "Yeah, I should have worked."

How would you tell a person to avoid what you call skipatitis?

Once you get started it's hard to stop. So, only catch a mild case. That would be the best way to say it. If you're going to skip, then know you're going to pay the consequences. Make sure the next day. You can't go up to the teacher and ask for the notes or whatever. You have to know someone. Another good trick is everybody, on the first day, or the first week, you find someone you know in that class or your friends. Even if it's an old acquaintance from an old school just to get the phone number down. Because if you skip class or you're sick, you need to get the notes or you need to know what the homework is or what the assignment is, you have to have someone there to cover for you. You have to know that you're going to pay the consequences for skipping. It's great to skip, it's fun to skip, but the way you'll feel is - The first couple of times it's, "I'm getting away with this. It feels great." But you're going to pay the consequences and that's it.

Is it hard to make friends in those first few weeks?

No, it's very easy. At least I find so. Everybody it seems in the whole class, especially when you're first there. Nobody knows each other yet. The idea that you don't come in by grades because everybody knows each other. Everybody usually is new. You'll find some people who know each other. But the best known thing is that you're walking down the street with somebody or you're walking down the corridor and you're with another friend and you say, "Hi, hi, hi." They introduce you and then you all know them and then they know their friends and they know your friends.

Where did you know them from?

Oh, first semester. The best friends are always from first semester. You make your friends in the first semester and you usually meet them in the same courses which are usually in your same program. So you see them again in the other semester and another semester and another semester. The idea of the humanities and everything is to see people out of your programs and you get to know them.

That's good.

It's very easy to make friends in class. It's not a strong friendship ever like you might find in high school but they're always friendly the majority of the time. There may be a couple of hard eggs or something. They can say anything they want, you know.

Is in class, then, the place where you can make friends easily?

Yeah. And there are so many social events at John Abbott. You go to the Agora or hang out at the Munchbox or whatever.

Do you think that you yourself have changed much since last year?

I can't remember what I was like. I guess I've tried to be more responsible. I've kind of shown it. You feel, I guess, more of an adult after you've survived the first semester. You say, "Hey, I'm not that irresponsible anymore. I got through it. Oh, no, another one." You never really change, you're always the same person.

What about the people that don't survive the first semester?

You've got to try and give it another try.

Yeah, like your friend.

You can't give up. I have a friend who was a rather good friend in high school and he was in Pure and Applied. He had a severe case of skipatitus and went down to the Oval everyday. I'm not saying he got in with a rough crowd but he never got out of it. He'd skip one class and then another. He was playing backgammon or something and, "Oh, I don't want to go to that class." It ended up that he didn't even come in for his exams or anything. Actually, I think his first couple of tests, because he didn't even open a book and he failed miserably. He switched into Social from Science, took maybe four courses. He'd come to school everyday but just to sit around in the Oval and that's it. I don't hear from him very much. Whenever I see him he's around in a daze. He's enjoying himself but you really have to decide where you want to go. CEGEP is an intervening period before you get a job or if you want to go into university. What do you want to do? You have to make the choices now and it's really a hard choice to make.

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